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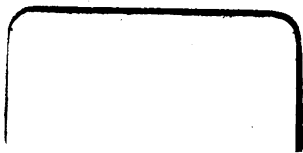
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# THE MAN FROM TALLTIMBER

THOMAS · K · HOLMES



KE 3135







**THE MAN FROM TALL TIMBER**









She seized the belt and he dragged her off  
the Drifting Cabin.

Page 417  
(*The Man From Tall Timber.*)

# THE MAN FROM TALL TIMBER

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By THOMAS K. HOLMES

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FRONTISPIECE BY  
R. EMMETT OWEN

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## THE MAN FROM TALL TIMBER



# THE MAN FROM TALL TIMBER

## CHAPTER I

### THE APPROACH

"No two ways about it, these city folks have blazed their trails proper. Couldn't have mistaken the direction—and here is the number."

He had arrived at a tall office building on Wall Street within a block of the Sub-Treasury and now gave a single reassuring glance at the number over the door before entering the building.

He was a man of twenty-six who looked older, was more than six feet tall, straight as a well-grown sapling, wide of shoulders, his torso tapering to lean flanks, and he walked with a stride which held in it all the spring and tension of a forest creature.

In the great circular rotunda of the building he found himself in a throng of people who were so busy with their own affairs that they scarcely noted the incongruity of his appearance.

For his dress was bizarre to a degree, and as he



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had walked downtown from the Grand Central Terminal it had attracted no small attention. He wore a wool cap with the eartabs tied by a thong over the crown, a mackinaw of blurred brown and green checks, and boots felt-legged to the knees over corduroy trousers. Probably no such oddly dressed figure had ever stood in this great lobby before.

The clang of the opening and closing of the gates of the elevators that rose all about him annoyed his ears. Bits of conversation as couples and groups of hurrying men passed him seemed to be in a foreign tongue, for they spoke of things he had never heard of before, and in a way which utterly puzzled the mind of this man from the woods.

However, he regained his composure after a minute and approached a uniformed elevator starter.

"Mister," he said, "where can I find a man named Stafford?"

"In this building?" asked the other, with a quickness of speech which contrasted in a marked degree with the easy drawl of his questioner.

"This is the number I got of his office."

"What does he do? How employed? In what capacity?"

"I couldn't tell you, Mister, except that he seems to be the big boss now his father is dead. Old Henry Stafford and some of his pards formed the American Consolidated Timber Corporation——"

"Shucks! why didn't you say H. Harvey Stafford?" interrupted the hallman. "Of course. Take express elevator to twentieth floor. General offices of the A. C. T. C. at number two thousand, two hundred and five."

A pat on his arm directed the stranger to the right elevator.

"Go-ing up!" droned the colored operator as the tall man stepped into the car.

"Ugh!" involuntarily grunted the visitor as the door clanged and the car shot upward. "Two thousand! More folks than ever got together at one time at Tall Timber Junction, even on circus day. And all in this one building. Whew!"

The expression of his wonder was unfinished when he was let out, with other passengers, at the twentieth floor. He got his breath again and saw the others scattering in the broad corridor on which countless doors opened. On the frosted panes of these doors were stenciled the names and employments of many men. The trail certainly was plainly blazed.

"Two thousand, two hundred, and five," murmured the man from Tall Timber.

He found it. He turned the knob of the door and pushed it ajar. A busy rattling of typewriters and buzzing of voices—the usual sounds of orderly bustle in a big office—smote this visitor as quite confusing.

His ear was attuned to the hum of the steam saw, the pumping of the engine driving it, the shriek of the blade when it struck a knot, the clatter of the empty carriage as it returned for the sawlog, and in addition the thousand and one sounds of the forest by day and night. But every sound he heard here was new to him; every sight more or less startling. He ventured into the main office of the American Consolidated Timber Corporation with the wariness of a wild creature creeping into an abandoned shack in the forest.

A girl at a desk near the door and beyond the long oak benches placed against the wall for the accommodation of visitors, rose and approached the man.

As she came into the direct line of his vision the woodsman appraised her with swift approval. Without being dressed in the extreme of fashion, as so many of her office mates were, she was the most wonderful looking girl he had ever seen.

From the peak of her coiffure to the tips of her brown suede shoes she was in coloring, in texture of dress goods, in the turn and finish of every little thing about her, the most amazing person the man had ever beheld—beyond anything he had ever imagined.

“Whom do you wish to see?”

Her voice was politely modulated, but distinct. She had swept his figure with a comprehensive glance; but now she fixed her gaze upon the top

button of his vest (it was exactly on a level with her pond-blue eyes, and she was a tall girl) above which his red and blue necktie was loosely knotted.

He was fully a half minute in answering, meanwhile continuing the appraisal of her entire appearance. He wanted to take back to the woods a picture of this girl. There was somebody there who would wish to know just how she looked—how she was dressed—even to the wonderful manner in which her great heap of golden hair was arranged.

He sighed, realizing his utter inability to draw a verbal picture of the wonderful creature, who asked again:

"Whom do you wish to see?"

"I—I——Mr. Stafford, if you please, Ma'am."

"Have you an appointment?"

"A—a what?"

"Is Mr. Stafford expecting you?"

"No, Ma'am, I don't think so. He don't know me, but I know him."

"I am afraid you cannot see him without an appointment," said the girl.

"How's that?" was his still puzzled question.

"Mr. Stafford is a very busy man. He is obliged to conserve his time. You must write to him for an appointment, stating your business with him. Then, if it is anything that interests him, his secretary will communicate with you and tell you when to call."

"So that's the way of it, eh?" repeated the man

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from Tall Timber. "We don't do business quite like that where I come from. To tell the truth he's in, isn't he?"

"Mr. Stafford? Oh, yes. He is in his office."

"You just tell him, Ma'am, that I'm waiting here. I'll wait till he isn't so busy, if I must. I've come more than two thousand miles to see him, and I don't count on goin' back without seeing him."

"You—you——Two thousand miles?" repeated the girl, for the first time showing a personal interest in the woodsman.

"Yes, Ma'am. I'm from Tall Timber. You tell him. I'm from where he makes his money—for all this," and he swept the big office with a comprehensive gesture.

"I don't know," murmured the girl, at length in doubt. "What is your name? I will see Mr. Trueford, his secretary. Perhaps——"

"John Longfoot is my name—from Tall Timber. He won't know me, Miss. But he'll know Tall Timber," was the visitor's confident assertion.

"I will see," repeated the girl.

She motioned him to a seat on the long bench against the wall. John Longfoot sat down and immediately appeared to become a bit of still life in the picture. None but an out-of-door man—a forester, a hunter, if you will—could have held himself under such physical restraint. Nerves were a name only to John Longfoot.

The men and girls at work before him began to steal glances at his strange figure; nor was it altogether his garments that attracted and held their curious attention.

Every article he wore had the freshness of the shops upon it; yet he wore them as one to the manner born. If any of these office workers thought he looked the part of the moving picture hero, they were mistaken in their premises. He was merely a modest man wearing his Sunday best. He had bought the outfit in which to come to New York new at Tall Timber.

Neither was it his lithe and upstanding figure that gained the visitor such general observation. It was something in his face—something that marked him as a being of an entirely different world from their own.

His countenance was rather long, but by no means saturnine. His lips were thin, and his mouth of ample size; but these gave him no grim expression. Merely his face was of a grave cast.

Scrupulously shaven, the marks of the razor were scarcely visible because of his coloring. Face and neck, from the thick mop of coal-black hair, which slightly curled, to the collar of his flannel shirt, was all of a bronze-red—a peculiar shade for even an out-of-door man. It was as though a warm, copper colored blush tinged all his visible skin.

He possessed both prominent nose and well-

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formed ears. A line drawn from middle-ear to middle-ear would have revealed rather high cheekbones. But the bony structure of his face was well covered with flesh, so that one did not particularly note this atavistic facial angle.

The most compelling feature of his countenance were his eyes. Young as he was, there were innumerable wrinkles at the outer corners of them. Not crowsfeet, but lines which were the result of narrowing the vision—marks usually found in the case of seamen and others whose habit it is to gaze afar. John Longfoot was used to peering over great distances with those brown-black eyes of his—eyes so black at times that they seemed to reflect the light like jade, but in repose, and when he was in kindly converse, they were of a soft seal-brown.

If John Longfoot was impatient, or if he was curious about the sights and sounds around him, he revealed such emotions in neither his placid appearance nor by any physical action. The girl came back to her desk from the secretary's private office. She did not speak to John Longfoot. He waited.

## CHAPTER II

### THRUST AND PARRY

At one side of a flat-topped desk of wonderful polish and of huge size, furnished in silver and cut-glass and with a broad, unblemished, leather-bound blotting-pad on it, sat a man in his early thirties who bulked big and was muscular looking even in a swivel chair.

He lacked that tan gained by business men whose free hours are spent in the open. Golf did not appeal in the least to H. Harvey Stafford. While others were chasing a silly ball about a cow pasture with a shinny-stick (his own expression) he preferred chasing the more elusive dollar. And any dollar the president of the American Consolidated Timber Corporation chased was very apt to be bagged. He was a money-getter.

He had never neglected his health, however, in this dollar chase. His father, Henry Stafford, had and had died with hardening arteries at fifty-odd. Not such would be H. Harvey Stafford's end. He was determined on that.

The comparatively young president of the A.C.T.



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C. did not deny himself the luxuries and pleasures of life. There was a fullness under his eyes and a certain set to his sensuous lips that betrayed to the keen observer that he followed no monkish path.

However, with a proper amount of gymnasium work, the daily attentions of a masseuse, and perfect grooming, H. Harvey Stafford not only looked to be in the pink of condition, but he was. He was a natty dresser, and even while sitting at his desk his well-tailored garments showed off his muscular figure to perfection.

Trueford, the secretary, came in without Stafford having summoned him. The very exact, punctilious secretary must consider the necessity for this of some moment. Stafford raised his eyes questioningly from the many-leaved document he was reading.

"Do you know a person named John Longfoot, Mr. Stafford?"

"Never heard the name. Who is he?"

"He comes from Tall Timber—and looks it," said the secretary.

"You mean——?"

Trueford described the visitor from the West so accurately that the picture he drew piqued H. Harvey Stafford's curiosity.

"What does he want?"

"To see you. He is quite insistent upon that point."

"Personal business?"

"Well," said Trueford, "it may be only a trick. But if it is, he carries it off well. Really——"

The telephone rang at Stafford's elbow. He put up one hand for silence as he drew the standard toward him and lifted the receiver to his ear. At the first sound of the voice on the wire an indefinable change came into his face—an expression that seemed to haze over the more severe lines of his countenance as a veil, rather than to soften them. It was as though he donned a silk mask, behind which he spoke:

"Yes? This is I, Grace.

"Surely! I should be delighted.

"Pearls? At Rotelli's in Maiden Lane? Quite the proper place—yes.

"I am no expert, Grace——

"Of course! I am at your service. At one-forty-five? With pleasure."

He listened to the other's remarks for some moments, smileless, his gray eyes half shut but focused upon a certain spot on the wall. If he was impatient at this interruption and at the inconsequential chatter of the girl on the wire, he hid it well, even from the waiting Trueford.

"How absurd!" he said at last. "No. With all my heart! You——

"I assure you—quite the contrary. My dear Grace, you are quite mistaken.

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"Yes. Luncheon, of course—at Savarin's? Thank you! Good-bye!"

He returned the receiver to the hook and pushed the stand aside. The cloud, or veil, or whatever it was, lifted from his face. He looked again at Trueford, all business once more.

"Send this man in," he said sharply. "He'll waste no more of my time than will be lost by our talking about it."

In this way John Longfoot, the man from Tall Timber, gained his interview with H. Harvey Stafford. He had seen the president of the A.C.T.C. in the West some years before; but at that time Stafford was not at his present business eminence.

The timberman saw that Stafford had thickened in body and was more alert in his manner. There was, too, an icy quality to his gaze that he had not possessed when, as a younger man, he had loafed and fished about Tall Timber.

It was not age that had touched him. Not at all. But his square jaw, his level gaze, the stony expression of the lower part of his countenance, marked him as a man in whom any expression of tenderness or of mercy would have difficulty in rising to the surface.

"You are John Longfoot, and you wish to see me?" said Stafford questioningly without motioning the visitor to a seat. "What about?"

"Well, you're likely to know of Si Patterson, of Tall Timber, I guess?"

"Yes. Silas Patterson is dead. I know that, and that he once owned some timberlands near Tall Timber which were bought in my father's day for the A.C.T.C."

"That's the man," said Longfoot. "Si was the owner of a good deal of the best stumpage around Tall Timber. He picked it up, piece by piece, trading for it, buying it, and so forth. Fact is, he got his hooks on a lot of it before folks around there ever thought of timbering on a big scale."

"Indeed?" said Stafford quietly. "I had no idea he ever held much of that land. What did he do with it?"

"Why, Mr. Stafford——"

"I know he was one of several small owners of timberlands from whom the A.C.T.C. obtained title," the even voice of H. Harvey Stafford went on. "What became of his other holdings—the land we did not get? Is the property in the market? If it is, and if you represent the heirs of Silas Patterson, Mr. Longfoot, you have come to the right man. The A.C.T.C. wants all the timber there is in that locality—if it can come by it at a fair price."

He did not ask his visitor to be seated. There was a studied exactness in his way of stating the matter that seemed to make it incontrovertible; and he appeared not to expect the interview to be a long one.

"I don't represent Si Patterson's estate except in a friendly way," John Longfoot replied. "He left

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only one heir. She's a girl. Gypsy, she's called. Si adopted her, all legal and proper, when she was just a little thing—fifteen or sixteen years ago. Si willed her everything he had."

"Including these timberlands you speak of?" put in Stafford patiently.

"I tell you, Mr. Stafford," John Longfoot said with an undercurrent of feeling in his drawling tone that was not easily explained, "when we came to look over Si's papers we couldn't find the title deeds to some of the pieces. There were memoranda of his quitclaiming certain holdings to your company in your father's time, and the boundaries were roughly mentioned. But the lawyer that examined the papers says they are scarcely understandable. Much as Si Patterson could do was to sign his name. He wasn't a lettered man, Mr. Stafford."

"I see."

"So his accounts are badly mixed up, and that's a fact," John Longfoot continued frankly. "In his will—he made it himself and it stands in court—he appointed three friends of his—three old lumbermen—executors, or administrators, or whatever you've a mind to call 'em."

"I see."

"I'm really acting for them. I've come on here to New York at their request to see you about this matter. Your company was the only purchaser of Si's holdings of which he seemed to have left any

record; and yet he never got paid for some of the pieces of stumpage that his friends are positive he once owned.

"You see, Si was an easy-going man in money matters, and he always seemed to have enough for himself and Gypsy. But now he's dead it seems impossible to locate either title deeds for his lands or money he should have been paid for them."

"Well?"

"Why, Mr. Stafford," pursued John Longfoot steadily, "it does seem as though Si never got all that was due him from the men who engineered the organization of the American Consolidated Timber Corporation. At least, we have found no trace of payments that should have been made for certain pieces listed in his memoranda as having been his in fee-simple.

"It looks as though the old man didn't get his dues. It may be there were deferred payments coming to him. It may be all as straight as a string, so far as we know. But your company must know all the facts, and we'd like to get 'em."

"Humph! We certainly have records of all the transactions my father and his associates had with this Si Patterson. Yes," Stafford agreed, unmoved.

"The lawyer finds records on the county books purporting to be transfers of some pieces of timberland to your company that Si's executors are positive belonged to him. Yet the transfers are given

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by other men, most of whom either are no longer in Tall Timber or, so far as we can find out, never were there.

"You see, Mr. Stafford, about twenty-five years ago there was a big blaze swept through that section. It burned Tall Timber Junction as flat as your palm and it even destroyed the County Court House. With that went most of the real estate records.

"There was a fellow that had been county clerk for a score of years, and he was familiar with the old records. With the aid of folks that had kept their property deeds from away back, he got at fairly accurate records of the real estate transfers and the farm and timberland boundaries."

"I had heard of this," rejoined Stafford quietly.

"Yes. Well, sir," went on John Longfoot, "the old records had been loosely kept, at best; the county clerk—nor nobody else—couldn't be expected to remember every transaction in timberlands away back in the early days. And the old clerk is dead, anyway, now. There are a good many titles that are cloudy in our part of the county.

"One thing is sure, however, and these three friends of Si's will swear to it. Si Patterson held title-deeds for years to certain pieces of property which 'pear to have been quitclaimed by your company—or to the men who organized it—by fellows that we didn't know ever even owned more'n the shirt on their back and a squirrel-rifle apiece."

"And you have come to me, Longfoot, thinking

that I can help you recover property which Silas Patterson's old cronies *think* he owned?"

Stafford's voice was cold, but not at all bitter. Indeed, he smiled pleasantly enough as he lay back in his chair and eyed the earnest man who towered above him.

"We think you might be able to explain," the man from Tall Timber said doggedly. "It ain't what Stetter and Killock and Neb Crane think; it's what they know. Si often talked about his holdings in the old days with his pards. And he often said, the last few years when he was a good deal bunged up, that when everything was straightened out with the A.C.T.C., there would be plenty for Gypsy."

"And this Gypsy is his adopted daughter?"

"Yes."

"Isn't there plenty for the girl?"

"As near as we can find out, when the lawyer is paid and the debts are canceled, there won't be anything coming to Gypsy Patterson, unless there were deferred payments due Si from your company, Mr. Stafford," declared John Longfoot with emphasis.

"I can assure you, Longfoot," said the other, in the same even tone, "that there are no such payments due Silas Patterson or his estate."

"No! You don't mean it?"

"Exactly so. This is all ancient history, Longfoot. You may be quite innocent in coming East on this quest. Nevertheless, it is a form of—er—



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well, we will call it an attempt to recover moneys which are not and never were due Silas Patterson. If the matter were pushed it would be called in the courts an attempt to swindle."

John Longfoot's eyes were jade-black now as he stared down at the placid Stafford.

"Just what does that mean?" he asked.

"It means that Patterson was obsessed for years—ever since the time my father, Anson Bass, John Doherty and Loraine Lemoyne bought up those timberlands, pooled their interests, and organized the A.C.T.C.—with the idea that he controlled and held the deeds of many pieces of timberland in which he did not have a shadow of right or a dollar's worth of equity.

"Every once in a while he would bother us with a demand for settlement of his claims. I am sorry to say father temporized with him. Father considered Silas rather childish——"

"Si Patterson childish!" ejaculated the visitor, amazed.

"Yes. Or, perhaps, a bit cracked——"

"'Cracked'?" repeated John Longfoot. "Mr. Stafford, you never knew Si Patterson, did you?"

"I never had the pleasure—if it can be called that—of meeting Mr. Patterson," admitted the other, and for the first time his suavity of manner slipped from him. He sneered.

"Si Patterson wasn't a man that any sensible person would call either childish or silly," the man

from Tall Timber observed with a certain change, too, in his voice and attitude.

"No?"

"No!"

The two eyed each other for a full minute in silence. That duel of glances between John Longfoot's black eyes and H. Harvey Stafford's gray ones was momentous. It was the beginning of a certain battle between the two men—a battle that bulked big in their future and the results of which were to change utterly their lives and, as in a burning crucible, destroy both the dross and the refinements of their natures.

Stafford sat forward in his chair and picked up the pencil with which he had been annotating the margins of the pages of the document he was reading when John Longfoot had entered. The latter said:

"Is that the best word you've got for me, Mr. Stafford?"

"That's the only word, Longfoot. I've listened to you patiently. It's old stuff, I tell you. The A.C.T.C. knows its rights and, I assure you, will pay nothing in the way of blackmail to anybody."

The leap he made from his chair the next instant betrayed on how keen an edge were both his temper and his nerves. His face blazed and his attitude was that of a man willing—aye, eager—for a personal encounter.

What he had seen in John Longfoot's eyes that

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spurred him to this act, it would be difficult to say. At least, the man from Tall Timber had neither moved nor spoken in a way to threaten. Physically he continued quite placid.

"Do you refuse to help us get at the truth of this matter, Mr. Stafford?" he asked, with steady voice.

"You have the truth. I have just told you," spat out the president of the corporation.

"Not to right a wrong, Mr. Stafford?" pursued John Longfoot, ignoring the other's excitement as well as his denial. "This girl—Gypsy Patterson—has nothing."

"What is that to me?" sneered Stafford. "Damn you, get out of here! And don't try to get to me again with any such story. If you do, I'll have you jailed. I haven't the same patience father had with you muckers. Get out!"

John Longfoot got out as he was bade. He went without a threat—indeed, without uttering another word. And in that he showed that he was by far the stronger man of the two.

## CHAPTER III

### THE BACK TRAIL

THAT he had come two thousand miles on a false hope and that he had gained nothing by his journey depressed John Longfoot's mind. He possessed at best a broad streak of despondency in his temperament, hereditary from the red side of his ancestry. In time of strife, either mental or physical, this trait did not make him pessimistic, but it forced him to meet trouble more than half way.

When he threw off his serious mood he was merry-hearted, quite in contrast to his gravity; for he had French blood in his veins, too—the light-some, hot blood of the Canadian *voyageurs*, who were the first whites to break "white water" all over Canada and the great Northwest. This cross of ancestry made John Longfoot a man of moods, if not moody.

The condition in which those old partners of Si Patterson had found the latter's papers had warned Longfoot in the beginning that difficulties, of which Gypsy Patterson's friend imagined little, confronted them and must be overcome before the girl's affairs could be straightened out.

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To come to H. Harvey Stafford and make these first inquiries was the direct way; and John Longfoot was a direct man. It could not be said that he hoped for much from the interview. Nevertheless, he had spent money and time in bringing it about because it was the first move. Having failed in gaining any help from Stafford, he had no thought of giving up the fight.

Patterson's three old friends were confident that Gypsy's father by adoption had died possessed of certain timber rights for which he had never been paid by the A.C.T.C., or anybody else. This was once fact, at least, upon which Stetter, Killock and Crane were agreed.

Nor had timber-thieves kept out of those particular areas of forest because of fear of punishment by the big corporation. It was because Si Patterson had been notoriously quick on the trigger and believed that, as in the old days, a man in the tall timber was a law unto himself and had a right to defend his own that trespassers had left the Patterson claims strictly alone.

H. Harvey Stafford's company policed its great holdings to the west of Tall Timber Junction. But never in Si Patterson's lifetime had the corporation's deputies or timber wardens tried to exercise authority in the disputed areas.

Stafford's attitude at the end of their brief interview betrayed to John Longfoot all he needed to

know. No man—least of all one as cool and self-possessed as the president of the American Consolidated Timber Corporation—needs to fly into a passion for emphasis if he has the truth behind him.

John Longfoot was no mean judge of mankind. He had mixed with all manner of men in the tall timber. H. Harvey Stafford might have a veneer that covered the raw man underneath; but not for a minute had he hoodwinked Longfoot.

The latter, however, had satisfied himself that neither gentle means nor argument would bring about a settlement of the claims of the Si Patterson estate, in which Longfoot held a sincere belief. Just what should be done next in the fight to gain Gypsy Patterson her rights, he did not know. But when they met again—he and H. Harvey Stafford—it would be upon a different footing.

He came out into the wintry sunshine of high noon on Wall Street and found himself in a turmoil of clerks and other luncheon-bound people, who seemed so excited and in so great a hurry that he was almost convinced at first that there was a fire in the neighborhood.

But as he took the back trail uptown, he saw that the populace in all the streets seemed to have doubled in number—and more—for the noon hour. More than ever was he a mark for every curious eye. Messenger boys and lads of older years were

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particularly interested in him because of his dress. He had a crowd tagging at his heels all the way up Park Row and into the Bowery.

It was for that reason as much as because he was hungry that he entered one of the better lunch places and so avoided the gaping street crowd. Had he wished to, he could have made acquaintances on all sides—even to the smirking cashier in her cage by the door. But John Longfoot's gravity of countenance was not broken for a moment. The stoical temperament of his ancestry was more pronounced than usual in his present unfamiliar surroundings.

Uptown he strode again after his brief meal, and it was at Union Square that the unforgettable incident of his journey East occurred.

It was a half holiday for the garment makers who work in the lofts beyond Fifth Avenue. The whole East Side seemed streaming back to its warrens below Fourteenth Street or crowding the crosstown cars bound for the Williamsburg Bridge.

For once John Longfoot halted to stare at these people—to him a foreign and hideous sight. They were like rats, he thought, clamorous and driven, deserting one foul runway for another, stricken, it would seem, by some strange panic.

They were puny-chested, pasty-faced, scrawny-limbed and blear-eyed for the most part. Here and there was a blooming cheek that set the mob off in

greater contrast. More painted faces passed him than he had ever imagined before—a disguise that merely accentuated their owners' lack of both physical and mental health.

In age the hurrying crowd ranged from ancient, gray-bearded men and wrinkled crones to boys and girls of tender years. The life of many a stunted child of ten years had been sworn away by hungry parents that he might obtain his working certificate.

It was one of these puny creatures, heedless in his haste, who darted directly in front of the almost silently running limousine coming down Fourth Avenue.

There was a clash of gears, a scream, clamor from the crowd as it scattered and then closed again to surround threateningly the stalled car, the front wheel of which had plunged into the curb and was there wedged. It had been absolutely no fault of the car's driver; but to these people an automobile, as a sign of wealth, was as a red rag to a bull.

John Longfoot strode across the intervening space and pushed his bulk into the middle of the threatening crowd. Their cries drowned the explanations of the shrinking chauffeur. He crouched on his seat, panic-stricken.

But the person who caught and held John Longfoot's gaze as he came through the crowd was the girl in the limousine. She was the only passenger—a vision of furs, feathers, and silks in harmonious



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shades of purple. She was a royal looking creature both because of her plumage and her haughty face and bearing. Here, John Longfoot realized, was a girl of a world as different from that of these clamorous beings about him as she was from his own world of the forests.

She opened the door of the car, and a warm and odorous breath like that from a suddenly uncovered bed of May blossoms fanned Longfoot's cheek.

"Oh! what has happened?" she asked. He read the words on her lips rather than heard them, for the voice of the angry throng rose higher.

Her eyes seemed purple, in harmony with her plumage. Her face was like satin, so delicate was its texture. Her little, gloved hand was laid for a moment on John Longfoot's arm.

"What has happened?" she repeated.

Longfoot looked down. Almost at his feet was the flattened body of the victim of the accident. The child's eyes were open—were wide with an agony that studded his pale brow with beads of sweat. He was conscious, and moaning faintly, with the rear wheel of the automobile resting across his hips.

There was blood on the boy's lips, and froth. Two scrawny little men, as heedless as they were useless, had each an arm of the poor child and were vainly striving to drag him out from under the weight of the wheel.

"Stop!" commanded Longfoot.

He threw these two feeble men aside with a sweep of his long arm. Another stride took him to the rear of the vehicle. The girl followed him, overlooking entirely the writhing features of the hurt child, although she, like Longfoot, stepped over his body.

"Oh, what can you do?" she gasped.

Longfoot did not appear to see her now. He jerked out another order to the vapid-faced men who had come near to dragging the victim apart.

"Wait till I get under this hind axle and lift the car. Don't attempt to drag him out till I get the weight off him."

He threw off his coat and plunged under the car with it. A policeman came—the first officer to arrive. But all he did was to drag the chauffeur out from behind the steering wheel and threaten with his night-stick the crowd that clawed at the fellow.

The girl bent to watch the man under the rear of the car. She seemed enthralled by the strange figure of the woodsman.

He had folded his mackinaw and as he set himself under the axle, he placed his palms upon the folded coat.

The axle rested across his shoulders. His arms were bent and he braced himself on all fours.

"Ready!" he grunted, and arched his back under the weight of the limousine.

Slowly, steadily, his arms straightened as he heaved upward. It was a weight to crack the sinews of a giant.

The girl, panting, her gloved hands clasped tightly, her nerves on that edge which holds a scream just behind the gritted teeth, looked as though she, too, were under the actual strain of the great weight on John Longfoot's shoulders.

The wheel slowly moved—so slowly that only those near by sensed what was being done. But they shouted as the two men, now with more moderation, drew the body of the child clear of the automobile.

"All right!" gasped the girl in purple.

She saw the great shoulder and neck muscles relax and the blood which had receded under the strain, pour into his neck and face in a dark red flood. He set the wheel upon the pavement, not suddenly but as though, after all, the strain had not been the limit of his endurance.

He backed out, bringing the wrinkled coat with him. The girl from the limousine caught his arm again.

"Who are you?" she panted, looking up into his grave face. "You are wonderful—wonderful! I never dreamed a man could do such a thing—to lift that car——"

"How's the boy?" he interrupted her. "I fear he's hurt bad."

"Who are you? What is your name? I want to know it!" she exclaimed.

"John Longfoot," he said, but he did not say it graciously.

He stepped around her to see what was being done for the hurt child. Of the boy the girl in purple seemed to take small notice. Her eyes remained fixed upon the man from Tall Timber, until another policeman accosted her.

An ambulance had been sent for. Fortunately for the girl in purple, there were enough sane witnesses of the accident to assure the officer that the driver of the limousine had been utterly guiltless. An officer got into the seat beside the chauffeur as the car was driven out of the crowd, but at Thirteenth Street the uniformed passenger stepped down, saluted, and allowed the car to continue on its way south.

The accident was sufficient to shake John Longfoot's mind loose from the problem it had been struggling with since he had left the offices of the American Consolidated Timber Corporation—for the time being, at least. But he had left in the president's office of that concern a man whose keen mind was not so easily turned from any subject to which it was once given.

Stafford had flung aside the document he had been reviewing when Longfoot was gone and had gone to the wall safe in which were kept certain papers

that the president of the A.C.T.C. would not even trust to the patent locks and steel walls of the vault in the outer office. Not even Trueford, his secretary, knew the combination of the lock of this wall safe.

From the receptacle, when he had opened it, Stafford brought to the desk certain envelopes tied with tape. In these were documents through which he ran swiftly, merely glancing at the docketing on the ends of some, but reading others attentively.

The scowl that marred his brow was portentous.

"Thought that thing would die naturally when the old fool was dead," he muttered. "And it would, very likely, if this half-breed hadn't butted in. There isn't a lawyer in Tall Timber who can't be made to see which side his bread is buttered on! As for that trio of old fools who were Si Patterson's cronies, they would be about as much bother as Si himself. But this damned Longfoot——"

The desk clock ticking away before him warned Stafford of the engagement made over the telephone before John Longfoot had come in. He returned the envelopes to the wall safe, locked it, and pressed the buzzer for the messenger to come to help him into his coat and hand him his stick and hat.

Rotelli's was less than ten minutes' walk from the A.C.T.C. offices. As he came in sight of the Maiden Lane jeweler's he saw the limousine slide

up to the curb and stop—the limousine driven by a frightened chauffeur who had not yet got his color back.

The girl in purple pushed open the door when the chauffeur touched the release lever, and stepped out almost into H. Harvey Stafford's arms.

"Oh, Harvey!" she exclaimed, her countenance more wrought upon by emotion than he had ever seen it before. "Oh, Harvey! Such an experience! And such a wonderful man! I—I am shaking now——"

"I can see you are not altogether yourself, Grace," he interposed, with rather a quizzical look. "Have you found another superior being to rave over? Let's see—the last was that cubist painter-fellow, wasn't it?"

For once, to his growing surprise, she was serious.

"I am not raving, Harvey. Indeed, tragedy has brushed me by. Although that Longfoot was by no means tragic——"

His start and muttered expletive were not overlooked by Grace Lemoyne.

"You know him!" she cried in accusation.

"John Longfoot—a half-breed Indian out of the tall timber?"

"That is he. Isn't he wonderful?" she demanded.

As they entered the lobby of the building in

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which Rotelli's was housed, she told him swiftly of the accident at Union Square. But it was John Longfoot and the marvel of his thews and sinews that she elaborated upon, not the injury done to the unknown boy.

"There may be an aftermath to that, Grace, if the boy is seriously hurt," he said, frowning.

"Yes. I know. Reynard was scared almost silly," she agreed, with some scorn. "Why is it a policeman looks such a monster to these foreigners? I must say I find them remarkably docile."

He laughed. "You have a way with you, lady, that turns the fiercest creature."

"I wonder?" she questioned, in suddenly retrospective mood. "I wonder if I could tame that John Longfoot? He—was—rather—brusk."

"Without doubt!" he exclaimed, with almost a snort.

"Oh, Harvey! Do you know him?"

"I have just been honored by an interview with the half-breed. He has come clear from Tall Timber to make me trouble."

"'Tall Timber'? That is where our money comes from—such as we have," she said shrewdly.

"Near Tall Timber Junction is the bulk of the A.C.T.C. timber holdings," he told her, with more moderation.

"And is he the kind of men they have out there?" she pursued, her face still alight with the enthusi-

asm she had shown at the beginning over John Longfoot. "What a perfectly wonderful race they must be, Harvey—these men of Tall Timber."

"Exactly," he agreed. "And eat with their knives and butcher the English language, regardless."

She made a little face. "Oh, well!" she admitted, "one can admire such people without wishing to sit at table with them or approve of what they do to the rules of grammar. You are such a perfectly proper old thing yourself, Harvey, that, really, a girl needs to see a man who is a contrast once in a while to appreciate fully your virtues."

She cuddled up to him, clinging to his arm in the deserted lobby, and smiled brilliantly into his face. Stafford did not question the genuineness of her affection for him, despite the fact that she had displayed little pity for either the boy who had been injured under her car or for the chauffeur who had been terrified by the possible results to him of the accident.

It was her pose. Grace Lemoyne was one of those girls who grow enthusiastic over trifles but who appear absolutely untouched by the realities of life.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE PATH TO PARADISE

THE tall, straight pines with scales of rubbed bark seemed to have been planted in a perfect geometrical pattern the full width of Breakaway Valley and on the easy slants of the hills bounding the valley on either hand.

Breakaway opened into that barren, sandy plain (old pineland it was, too, as its light soil attested) on which the scattered town of Tall Timber Junction was built along the right of way of the St. P. M. & W. and its M. S. Branch. The valley extended thirty miles directly north, narrowing between the timbered hills and finally ending in a pocket out of which the tote road to Blainesburg rose steeply.

This road—a dull red ribbon through the length of the valley—touched here and there a clearing, knitting the lonely little farms to the Junction by this slow means of traffic. Following the old tote road in either direction one could not see far in advance; one came upon these small farmsteads unexpectedly in every case. But to the east and to the west, stretching for miles from the bottom of

the valley and up the hillsides, it was possible to see for long distances between the straight rows of pines.

All day long the sun shone into these wide, brown carpeted aisles—at sunrise slanting down from the summit of Eagle Ridge; overhead at noontide, drawing warm scent from every pine-frond; toward evening, hanging a ball of glory over Paradise Knoll, the highest point on the west side of Break-away. These wide aisles ran east and west only. The mathematical precision in the setting of the trees was not carried through in the cross direction. The tall timber was set to fall with the sun's daily course.

There was more than a breath of spring in the air. Crows were wheeling through the forest, spying out newly turned garden plots and calling the news to each other. There were still yellow-white patches of snow in sheltered corners. But the sun had been warm enough for several days to coax to life many timid growths under the coverlet of fallen leaves and pine tags, so that their pleasant odors seeped through and rose in the nostrils of the girl who, in the late afternoon, came tripping down one of the broad aisles from Paradise Knoll.

The cathedral-like aisle through which she passed had been beaten hard in spots by both iron shoe and calked boot. Behind the girl, just under the hooded summit of the Knoll, was visible a

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patch of clearing and the slab roof of a dwelling of some importance as houses went in the tall timber.

She approached a small farmstead, abutting on the tote road of red mud, which, if but scantily cultivated, was at least marked by certain signs of affluence. It was well fenced; there was a broad fire-guard plowed outside the fence; the pig-pens, chicken houses and runs, and other outbuildings, were in good condition. The roof of the dwelling in the middle of the clearing was of hand-hewn shingles.

There were three doors to the house—one each on the east, south and west; and there were three woodpiles in the yard, a chopping block with axe driven into it beside each pile.

As a usual thing, in pleasant weather a comfortable armchair with splint-bottom stood beside each of the entrances to the house. But as the girl approached in good view of the clearing, the three chairs were drawn together on the warmest side of the dwelling and their occupants were in earnest and vociferous conversation—if such a wrangling confabulation could be called conversation at all.

“I tell you, Bedrock Mill was set up the year McKinley was made president, an’ it ain’t missed runnin’ a season since,” was the confident declaration of the shortest and fattest man of the trio—a red-faced, smoothly shaven, somewhat asthmatic individual who peered out at the world through lit-

tle, twinkling blue eyes that were kindly despite the snap in them when he was arguing.

"There you go, Eben Stetter, makin' statements you can't noways back up or make to lie plumb with the fac's. Bedrock Mill was goin' a year before McKinley was boosted into the president's chair—which he'd never got to if I'd had my say about it."

"'Tis lucky you didn't have your say," flared the fat man wheezingly. "I've always noticed, Neb Crane, that when things do go your way they go mighty bad. McKinley made a purty good president, if he did get himself shot——"

"Well," snarled the first speaker, "what's that got to do with Bedrock Mill? I say——"

"An' you say wrong," wheezed the other.

"'Tain't so! I'm right. Bedrock——"

"I kin prove it," Stetter asthmatically repeated. "Sam, ain't I right?"

"I'll leave it to Sam, too," put in Neb Crane, who was bewhiskered, wiry of build, and wore silver-framed spectacles high on his bald brow where the sun, glinting on the lenses, made them look like the eyes of some huge and ugly beetle. "Now, Sam, ain't I right about Bedrock?"

"Ain't I right, Sam?" demanded the asthmatic Stetter with equal eagerness.

Sam Killock was a lanky man, dressed in white duck. His trousers were too short in the leg by at least six inches and were hoisted so high by his "galluses" that he seemed to be in danger of being

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split clear to his prominent Adam's apple. His coat sleeves were so short that the red knobs of his wrist-joints were painfully displayed, as well as about half the length of his forearms. Altogether he seemed, if one did not look at his face, like an overgrown boy dressed in undergrown garments.

He wore what was popularly called in the tall timber a "soup-strainer" mustache, which drooped in front of thin, grim lips; his eyebrows were grizzled and prominent, and under the penthouse of his brows were two round, black, beadlike eyes. One of those eyes was of glass; but they both had the same expression of suspicion.

His abundant, whitening hair was silky and was fluffed up so on the top of his head that, with his high-bridged nose, he had all the belligerent air of an angry cockatoo. When he spoke he puffed out his bristling mustache in scorn, saying:

"As usual, both of you fellers are plumb wrong. Bedrock Mill wasn't established till Bob Jackson come here to survey Bear Gulch—and that was two year after McKinley was elected."

"Go 'long!" squeaked Stetter.

"That ain't so!" declared Neb Crane, his spectacles fairly bobbing up and down in his excitement.

"Well, now, you both left it to me to decide, didn't you?" demanded Killock.

Crane and Stetter glared at each other and then at Killock. His bold statement silenced both for the moment, and the cockatoo-man preened him-

self. Before the argument could break out again the girl came through the leather-hung gate at the foot of the path to Paradise.

"Good-day, Uncles all!" she cried, cheerily. "How is the 'rheumatiz' and the phthisic and the glass eye? And do tell me what the subject of the argument is, so that I can enjoy it."

She had a winsome, blooming little face, her features as clear-cut as a cameo. Her whole figure was dainty, light, butterfly-like, as though she were poised all the time for flight.

Gypsy Patterson's appearance quite bore out her name. She was dark of complexion, and had flashing eyes and blue-black hair which curled naturally. She tied the curls back with a cherry ribbon to keep them out of her eyes, and safely called her hair dressed. This trick of hair-dressing made her seem much younger than she really was, for Gypsy was twenty, or thereabout.

She wore a short skirt and solid, laced tan boots. Her blouse was open at the throat, and its sleeves came only to her elbows, early as was the season. She was as brown as a berry, every inch of her skin that was visible, and the flopping-brimmed hat, the crown bound about with another cherry ribbon, was set jauntily upon her head. Altogether she was a sight to make the three wrangling old fellows grin a broad and delighted welcome.

"I ain't got scurcely a mite of rheumatism to-day, Gypsy," Neb Crane was first to declare.

"I can get my breath purty good, girl," observed the fat member, his blue eyes twinkling.

"I can't see much farther through the glass eye than I ever could, Gypsy," croaked Sam Killock, actually beaming. "But if it could be give vision I don't doubt but what sight of you would do it!"

"Hi! yi!" exclaimed Neb, "she is a sight for sore eyes."

"That she is," agreed Stetter.

"Goodness! The Millennium is at hand," the girl cried, laughing. "All three of you are for once agreed. Will wonders never cease?"

"As usual," said Killock, "both o' these fellers have to foller my lead. That's why they settled here in Breakaway Valley. Couldn't noways get along without me."

"No two ways about it," wheezed Eben Stetter, his face very red, "Sam Killock has got the very best kind of an opinion of himself."

"He don't hate himself none whatever," joined in Crane, his whiskers bristling as he glared at the man who always knew it all.

"I'd tell a man!" snorted Killock. "You fellers tagged me right into this valley——"

"Me and Si was first in this valley," broke in Neb Crane.

"You mean me and Si Patterson," rejoined the fat man.

"You are both wrong—as usual," confidently retorted Sam Killock. "Si and me cruised a part of

this timber before ever you fellers come down from Blainesburg."

"'Tain't so! I tell you——"

"You're dead wrong! Me and Si——"

The girl had been waiting to speak again for several moments; but every time she opened her lips one of the trio got ahead of her. Now Stetter's eyes were blazing and he wheezed like a leaky accordion. Neb Crane's whiskers bristled and his face was very red. Sam Killock's prominent Adam's apple slid up and down after the fashion of the U-slide of a trombone.

Gypsy stuck fingers in both ears and squealed:

"I—wa-a-ant—so-o-ome—e-e-eggs! Aunt Tabby Murdock wants to know if you have any to spare!"

This acclamation finally penetrated the hearing of the three old fellows, and they smothered their bickerings again.

"Eggs?" jerked out Neb Crane. "Of course there's eggs. There must be."

"If Miss Tabby wants eggs, I reckon we'll find some," wheezed Stetter.

"If you have to lay 'em yourself, I suppose?" sneered the bewhiskered one.

"It ain't me that's been standin' guard night and day at the henhouse door waitin' for an egg to be laid so's I could make an herb om'let," panted Stetter.

"You're mighty right," put in Killock, with a high cackle. "That's what Neb's been doin',



Gypsy. He ain't been fur out of sight of the hen-house for a week. You know that old red rooster that got his toes froze off in December? Well, the critter can't roost no more on the poles in the hen-house, so he creeps into one of the nests at night and sometimes in the daytime. Blamed if Neb wasn't hangin' 'round yesterday waitin' for that old rooster to come off the nest, thinkin' mebbe he'd laid an egg."

"Ha! Ha!" wheezed Stetter, in a high, asthmatic croak.

The three held their poultry in common, and were constantly quarreling over the distribution of the eggs. But like Stetter, the two others were anxious to accommodate Aunt Tabby.

"Well, I did find a few," admitted Crane, paying little attention to Sam Killock's gibes, "and Miss Tabby is jest as welcome to 'em as she can be, Gypsy."

Sam had already started for the south door of the queerly built house. That was the entrance to his living room. Neb went to the east door, and the asthmatic Mr. Stetter waddled away to the west side.

"I suppose both them highbinders have been holdin' out eggs on me, Gypsy," said Sam, the first to return, with a yellow bowl in his hands. "But they got to git up plumb before sun-up to beat me."

He displayed half a dozen eggs which he put

carefully into Gypsy's basket. Neb came back with four.

"And there ain't nary one of 'em rooster eggs," he said, shooting a scornful glance at Killock.

Eben Stetter appeared with eight.

"My soul and body!" ejaculated Killock, his top-knot ruffling. "Can you beat him? That fat lum-mox always gets the best of us. Where did you get eight eggs, Eben?"

"One o' them brown biddies has been stealin' her nest out on you," Stetter replied. "But she can't fool me! You tell Miss Tabby she's mighty welcome, Gypsy, and I'm goin' to be up to Paradise to see her to-night, it's likely."

"You ain't got no call to go up there, wheezin' like a rusty gate-hinge the way you do," snarled Neb Crane scornfully. "An' I'm going up to-night, anyway."

"I'm thinkin' that as fur as Miss Tabby is concerned, you can both stay to home," observed Sam Killock. "She's a mighty good-natured lady; but you can push her too far, I guess. I ain't heard her say anything about wantin' to see either of you fellers—and I'm goin' up to Paradise myself after supper."

Gypsy laughed as the three glared at each other.

"Come on along—all three of you," she said, preparing to depart with the eggs. "Aunt Tabby Murdock and I will both be glad to have you come

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and sit awhile. But you know she won't allow any fussing up there. Good-bye, Uncles all!"

She waved her hand to them when she had gone through the gate, and then set her face toward the path to Paradise.

Stetter wheezed a long sigh. "Hi golly! she's a mighty fine girl," he opined.

"She's a daisy!" The enthusiasm of Neb Crane urged him to agree.

"There ain't Gypsy's beat 'twixt here and sunset," proclaimed the cockatoo-like Sam in his croaking voice.

"My, my!" panted Eben Stetter. "I remember just like it was yesterday when Si Patterson brought her into camp after the hold-up of that wagon-train that was goin' through to Grand Falls."

"She was as purty as a picture right then," agreed Neb Crane.

"A sweet little critter," joined in Sam Killock.

"Silver Shot, the bandit, was the cause of that child's losin' her folks," ruminated Stetter. "He was one mighty bad *hombre*."

"Silver Shot was bad, all right," said Neb; "but he never held up that train. 'Twas One-eye Loder—him that was hung afterwards for sticking up the Blainesburg Bank."

"You're crazy, Neb Crane!" wheezed Stetter. "One-eye wasn't never seen nor heard tell of in this part of the country when Si found Gypsy all alone up there on Eagle Ridge where the old wagon road

used to be. It was Silver Shot done them pilgrims to death—Silver Shot and his gang.”

“ ‘Twasn’t neither!” returned Neb angrily. “Think I don’t remember nothin’? Si said himself that One-eye Loder and his bunch of rustlers done it. Ain’t that so, Sam?”

“Hey!” panted the equally excited Stetter, “ain’t I right, Sam? Wasn’t it Silver Shot?”

“You are both wrong,” decided the judicial Killock. “Silver Shot was in jail at Larrime at that identical time, and Loder come here afterwards. It was Nosy Wallick shot up that wagon train, and like enough made Gypsy an orphan both ways from the ace. I don’t know what’s the matter with you two fellers. ‘Pears to me you ain’t got no memories at all no more. You certain-sure are breakin’ up——”

He could go no farther in this harangue, nor was there opportunity for the other two to express their untrammelled opinions of his statement. The shadow of a tall, striding figure appeared at the corner of the house. The three shouted in unison:

“John Longfoot!”

“Hi! Yi!” cackled Neb Crane, “John’s home again.”

“How’d New York strike you, John?” wheezed Stetter.

“What’s the good word for Gypsy?” put in Sam Killock. “That’s what we three old shagbarks want to know.”

## CHAPTER V

### UNDER FIRE

WHEN the house in the Breakaway had been built by Si Patterson's old partners, Eben Stetter, Neb Crane, and Sam Killock, they had quarreled, as usual. Neb always liked to awake in the morning, so he said, with the sun shining in his eyes. Eben, on the other hand, desired a westering sun to warm his sleeping chamber in winter. As for Sam, he craved a southern exposure all the year around. So they divided the house into three apartments, with a general storeroom at the northern side, and each man had a doorway to face the quarter which he preferred.

If they craved an argument, however, they could drag their splint-bottomed armchairs to within discourse of each other, as upon this spring afternoon. Now they were all equally anxious to hear John Longfoot's report.

The younger man sat down upon Stetter's chopping block. His lips were grave, but his brown-black eyes were wreathed about by humorous wrinkles as he viewed the three old fellows. He knew

they had been bickering the moment before he appeared.

"How are you all?" he asked, without immediately answering their questions.

"Don't matter about our health," snapped Sam. "Let's hear the worst. Have we got to go gunning for that timber company, or are they going to do what's right by little Gypsy?"

"Stafford denies his corporation owed Si a penny," John Longfoot said directly.

"The robbers!" wheezed Stetter.

"Timber thieves! I knowed it!" cried Neb Crane.

"That's all I expected you'd get," snarled Sam. "Might ha' knowed it before you spent your fare to New York."

"I'm not charging that against the estate," said Longfoot easily.

"It is some satisfaction to know for sure that old man Stafford's son and his gang are land-grabbers," croaked Crane.

"I'm goin' to load up the old shotgun," panted Stetter, "an' give 'em both barrels if I ever ketch 'em on Si's property."

"She'll kick you into Kingdom Come," snapped Sam. "Let me ketch you loadin' of it!"

"Shooting Stafford or his agents won't help," John Longfoot said with continued gravity. "And they have not trespassed yet."

"But the timber hereabout needs cuttin' if Gypsy's to get the good of it," complained Crane.

"Wonder what would happen, John, if you put a gang into it with crosscut saws?" Stetter suggested.

"That would be bringing matters to a head with a vengeance," said the younger man. "I don't care to lock horns with the A.C.T.C. in a law court. They have too much money."

"Ain't it the truth?" agreed Sam Killock.

"It strikes me," Longfoot pursued, "that we should try to get something on Stafford's company. If that lawyer could find some of those men whose names are on the transfers in the county records——"

"Hi! Yi!" yelled Crane. "Not a chance! They're all dead and gone, or been paid to disappear. I said that from the first."

"And how are you goin' to pay that Bob Larrabee any more money?" wheezed Stetter. "There ain't scarcely a dollar left for Gypsy."

"She isn't to know that," said John Longfoot, quickly. "We're agreed on that, boys?"

The three old fellows nodded in unison.

"It will be at least a year before she'll expect you to make a settlement with her," he went on. "She calls herself twenty, and Si's will says she is only to come into possession of his estate when she's twenty-one. We ought to be able to do something in a year."

"But what?" Sam Killock demanded.

"Put on your thinking caps, you three fellows," urged Longfoot. "There's always more ways of killing a bobcat than choking it to death with butter. I'll give what time I can to it. But the water's high in Brindle River, and I have to get my gang right after that mess of timber I've got stacked along the bank of it. She'll go out with a whoop to-morrow or next day. I got back from New York just in season."

"Gypsy'll want to see you," said Stetter.

"You stay here to supper, John," Neb Crane put in.

"He's goin' to eat with me!" declared the third old fellow, getting up briskly. "I count on getting an early supper, anyway, for it's a right smart step up to Paradise."

"Huh!" snorted Stetter.

"Hi! Yi!" barked Crane. "You reckon on cutting me out with Miss Tabby to-night, do you? Well, I'm purty spry, if I do suffer some from rheumatiz. I'll show you."

"Huh!" repeated Stetter, "if you two old scallwags think you can beat me out 'cause I'm a mite phthisick—Huh!"

Each man went about his supper preparations, leaving John Longfoot to fill his pipe and chuckle over it as he did so. There were three flues to the huge chimney that rose through the middle of the roof. Each householder had his own sheet-



iron stove and cooking utensils. Their housekeeping arrangements were as neat and precise as though they were three old maids rather than three old bachelors. And within their limitations they were all good cooks.

The younger man smoked reflectively until Sam began to toss flapjacks. Longfoot had brought back from New York with him more to reflect upon than he could easily explain to Si Patterson's three old partners. The settlement of the Patterson claims against the A.C.T.C. was going to be no small matter.

The lumberman had seen H. Harvey Stafford and had judged him. John Longfoot had one advantage over the president of the timber corporation; of that he was confident. He could keep his temper. Longfoot fully realized that advantage.

He had met men before who had flown into a passion and damned him. He had held himself in leash and waited. Such waiting had always paid in the end. It had given him some eminence in the tall timber. Even the roughest of his rivals in the woods had given over throwing up his cross-blood at him. They could not trouble him by either sneers or innuendoes.

John Longfoot was getting ahead. He had some capital and more credit. He had cut and would float this spring two good-sized drives on Brindle River. If they went through all right, he would have doubled his cash capital.

With this accomplished, he proposed to see if something could not be done for Gypsy. But he did not tell even these three old men—her sworn friends and well-wishers—all that he was willing or proposed to do.

"Pull up and set to, John," called Sam Killock. "Like enough you ain't had a mess of flapjacks like these whilst you was gone to New York."

"You are mighty right, Sam. I didn't get our sort of grub on the train. And I didn't eat but once in the big town, and she wasn't much for a hearty man. I had cakes, but they weren't flapjacks."

"Yes," said the cockatoo-man, "I went to Chicago once on one o' them trains, and the most I got to eat was do-funnies and thingumbobs, with a slather of useless silver cutlery each side of the plate, no end! I never did find out what some o' them dinguses was for. You couldn't pick your teeth with all of 'em. A feller don't have that many teeth. Ready for another, John? Ketch!"

He slung the flapjack in approved style, and smoking hot, upon the visitor's plate. There were baked beans and fried side-meat, while the place of honor on the table was given to a sweetcake as solid as a brick and pallid looking, which Sam cut off in thick slabs to be sopped in the coffee.

The housekeeper wasted no time; but he left everything spick and span when he followed Long-foot out and closed his door. Stetter was already

mounting the path to Paradise in the fading sunlight. Neb Crane, hobbling briskly on his cane, soon took up their trail. And so, strung out in this sort of procession, they mounted the slope toward the slab-roofed house which was already in the shadow cast by the hood of Paradise Knoll, behind which the sun had gone down.

Before they were half way up the hill a light showed in the Patterson kitchen. Aunt Tabby was already at her knitting under the lamp. But when John Longfoot and Sam, passing the wheezing Stetter, reached the yard gate first of all, the clear contralto voice of Gypsy called from the side porch:

"Is that you, John?"

"It's me, Gypsy."

"'Home from a foreign shore?'" laughed the girl. "Come and tell me all about it. Just to think! you've been clear to New York, John. I wonder if I shall ever see New York?" she added a little wistfully.

"She ain't much to see," he said soberly, sitting down on the edge of the porch while the three old fellows attacked Aunt Tabby's citadel by way of the kitchen door. "I went clean through her and back again, and there wasn't much to see but tall houses and noisy streets."

Gypsy laughed softly again. "Oh, John! And how long were you there?"

"Rising five hours."

"Five hours in which to see the biggest city of the Western Hemisphere. Why! you didn't begin to look at the people you passed."

"I saw a drive of 'em—surely!"

"How were they dressed—the girls, I mean?"

His countenance broadened at that question and his eyes began to twinkle. He really had only glanced at the haughty young person from the limousine. But there was that wonderfully dressed girl who guarded the gate in the offices of the American Consolidated Timber Corporation.

"If you could see her, Gypsy!" he sighed. "Her hair was all glinty and piled high in do-funnies, like Aunt Tabby's crullers."

"Marcel waves. Yes. I've seen pictures of them," she observed.

"She had a comb in it that sparkled like quartz-rock. She wore a basque all cut away at the neck——"

"A basque!" crowed Gypsy, laughing again. "Oh, John!"

"Well, it wasn't like your blouse."

"No. I never do have anything fashionable. The nearest I get to see the fashions is the mail order catalogue."

"You—you want the sort of gewgaws that girls wear in the city?" he hesitated. "There isn't anybody here in the tall timber to show 'em off to."

"Goodness! I can show 'em to the squirrels and

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the rabbits, can't I?" she demanded, rather tartly. "But go on, John. Tell me more about her."

He tried to. The shoes the girl had worn perplexed him. "They were like a glove—a fancy glove," was his conclusion.

"And I wear brogans like you men," Gypsy scoffed. "Do you know what I mean to do, John, when I get my money from the Uncles?"

"No," he said, startled.

"I am going to shut up the house and take Aunt Tabby and go to the city. And I am going to dress up to beat the band!"

"Like those tourist women who were here at the Junction last fall?"

"Goodness! They were in plain traveling clothes. And that girl you told me about was just in her working dress. You wait, John! I'll blossom out in the kind of things women wear to balls and parties and to the theater. You won't know me."

"No," agreed Longfoot, shaking his head. "I won't know you then, I guess—and you'll soon forget us. You'll be a far way out of our class, Gypsy."

"Don't talk about 'class,'" she rejoined, her voice still betraying vexation. "What am I better than you folks in the tall timber? I'm a girl from nowhere! Nobody knows who I am or where I come from, or what sort of folks my people were."

"But you, Gypsy—well, we can all see that you are different from us backwoods folks."

"You've got better eyes than I have, then, John Longfoot!" she exclaimed. "If Uncle Si Patterson hadn't found me after that wagon-train hold-up and brought me home, what would I have been better than a half wild Indian papoose? Or, maybe I'd been eaten by the wolves. I'm just nobody!"

"You've got a lot of friends, Gypsy."

"And mighty good ones," agreed the girl frankly. "Aunt Tabby and all you men are good to me. But I don't know any girls. Even those I went to school with at Deer Lick have forgotten me. I don't get a letter once in a dog's age from any of them."

"Folks that neglect you that way, Gypsy, aren't worth bothering about," he said warmly.

"No. It's because I live 'way out of the world," she replied. "I have no clothes, and the girls I met at Deer Lick Seminary all knew how to dress. Almost all of them were rich."

"Huh! money isn't everything," and he repeated the old commonplace with emphasis.

"It comes pretty near buying everything," she laughed. "It is what you are working so hard for, John. Why, it's what you went to New York for—money! Isn't it?"

"Well—yes, Gypsy," he admitted.

"Didn't you go to the American Consolidated

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Timber Corporation to make some bargain with them for next season?"

"Er—something like that."

"Did you see that Stafford fellow who was out here that time—you remember, John? H. Harvey Stafford? They say he is the head of the whole concern now."

"Yes. I saw him."

Gypsy giggled. "I remember I only dared peep at him from out of the bushes when he went by. I thought he was the most wonderful man! And I guess he is."

Silence—and much of it—from John Longfoot.

"Now that he has taken his father's place in the corporation, I suppose he will never come out here again," said the girl, half wistfully.

John Longfoot got up from his seat on the porch.

"He was such a fine looking man! And he was dressed to the nines!"

"Good-night, Gypsy," Longfoot said.

"Good-night," she returned as idly as though her thoughts were wholly fixed upon her memory of the wonderful H. Harvey Stafford.

A rim of silver moon was showing above Eagle Ridge across the valley. As John Longfoot went through the gate and stumbled across the freshly plowed fire-guard, he walked straight into the increasing moonlight. His shadow lay long and black behind him, growing in length as he strode down the path between the tall pines.

"There!" the girl whispered, making a little face after him in the darkness of the porch, "you will be as dumb as a pine-knot, will you, John Long-foot? Now I have given you something to think about."



## CHAPTER VI

### WHITE WATER

JOHN LONGFOOT's crew had not been paid off in full for the season's cut; but at the lay-off, three weeks before, he had given each man enough money on account to make their vacation at Tall Timber Junction a very wet spell indeed.

He was not able to comb together on this next morning, therefore, his full complement of men. And some of those he did get were not in very good fettle for work. He had depended on Big Steve M'Graw to keep the gang in decent trim; but M'Graw was too easy-going under some circumstances to make a good boss.

When Longfoot looked the crowd over on their arrival at the camp on the east bank of Brindle River he was tempted to pay off eight or ten of them on the spot. A log drive, however, can scarcely be handled properly with less than forty men and the Brindle was rising by leaps and bounds, for, back in the hills, there had been heavy rains for a week and the ice had all gone out.

The hilarity and recklessness of his gang began to trouble John Longfoot. They did not sober up

as they should after they got to work. Instead, some of them showed evidence of having the means at hand of continuing the drinking bout in which they had been indulging.

"Who's got the forty-rod, Steve?" Longfoot demanded of his foreman. "Can't tell me that some of these huskies haven't been hitting it up since they got here. There's a bootlegging place somewhere, I'll be bound!"

"Well, boss, I don't know——"

"Oh, yes you do!" interrupted Longfoot sharply. "Don't try to save their faces. Just you pass the word that I'll sack the first fellow I catch taking a drink."

"Shucks, boss! they'll leave us in a muddle."

"They'll put us in a muddle if they keep on drinking. Now, mark what I say," Longfoot said sternly.

He sent a runner to the three old timbermen in the Breakaway asking them to come and roll logs. Old and crippled as they were, Stetter and Crane and Killock each had a dexterity with the peavey that few younger men possessed.

The three arrived at the camp of the Longfoot outfit, just above the last patch of white water that fretted the stream before it spread into the sluggish broads at Tall Timber Junction, before the day was half gone.

Longfoot's gang had, during the winter, cut over

a strip of timber along the east bank of the Brindle which had belonged neither to Si Patterson's claim nor to the stumpage held by the American Consolidated Timber Corporation. Clearing this strip had opened the way to the border of one of the Patterson patches for a length of nearly ten miles. Had there been no cross-claim on this patch, a hundred choppers could be put into the piece, come next season, and several million feet of lumber taken out and sold for Gypsy's benefit. The three old fellows wrangled about this as they came to the Long-foot shacks.

"I tell you," Stetter panted, "John ought to go right into that strip next fall and commence to cut. Hell nor highwater wouldn't stop me if I was his age and wanted to do Gypsy a good turn."

"No. But the A.C.T.C. wardens would stop you," croaked Neb Crane. "John wouldn't get a fur ways with no such game. It's likely just what that Stafford and his gang are waitin' for."

"I don't believe it!" declared the asthmatic one.

"You never will believe the truth till it's knocked into your head," scoffed Crane.

"I tell you a bold hand——"

"What's that about a boiled ham?" broke in Crane, who had an exasperating habit of appearing hard of hearing on occasion.

"Dog-gone! I'll leave it to Sam," wheezed Stetter, furious. "Don't it stand to reason, Sam, that

if John went ahead and began cutting that Stafford would likely think twice about obstructing him?"

"Wouldn't the corporation get John smack into court, Sam?" demanded Crane.

"You're both wrong, same's usual," declared Killock. "Stafford and his gang is just as anxious to get that strip of timber swamped and out as we are. He wouldn't put up no kick if John was fool enough to put in a gang and cut it. But he'd grab the timber after it was cut and snaked out to the river bank, and no two ways about it! I should think even you old shagbarks could see that."

This was a wet blanket that made Stetter and Crane hesitate to advise John Longfoot as to his future course in cutting Gypsy's timber. They all knew the power of the A.C.T.C.—a power that was always doubled when it got into court. Like most huge business corporations, Stafford's organization had not neglected the appointment of judges, the election of sheriffs, and the subsidizing of the larger part of the legal talent of the county that was really worth anything.

John Longfoot was quite right in wishing to fight shy of any legal wrangle with the A.C.T.C. The three old timbermen knew well enough that, unless they had actual proof of illegal actions on the part of the wealthy corporation, to begin suit in court would be as useless as pouring sand down a

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rat-hole. Still, Stetter and Neb Crane grumbled.

"Poor leetle Gypsy's goin' to come out of the leetle end o' the horn," sighed Stetter.

"I don't know but they'll turn her off that patch of clearin' on Paradise Knoll when it comes to the showdown," croaked Crane.

And even Sam Killock had nothing more comforting to suggest.

They came to the river bank and found the tall young timberman and his crew at the work of launching the logs. Even the cook and his helper had been given peaveys, and Longfoot begged Neb Crane to take over the commissariat, while the two more able old men went in with the gang to roll logs.

The new arrivals were needed. Although the work had gone on apace since daybreak, there had been too much frolicking and carelessness for the gang to have made as good a showing as it should. And now that Longfoot had reprimanded several of the more boisterous fellows, they sulked.

"You're here to roll logs, Fetter, not to wear everybody's ears out telling about the girl you met down at the Forks. Get busy, there!" was the timberman's advice to one of the more reckless ones.

"Say! who was your slave last year, Longfoot?" snarled the man addressed.

"You were one of 'em," was the cool answer. "And that is all you'll ever be—another man's

slave—as long as you hit the forty-rod the way you do.”

This raised a laugh even among Fetter’s boon comrades. He muttered:

“I’m doing my share.”

“I say you’re not—and my say goes,” Longfoot told him grimly. “Watch what you’re about.”

Fetter was in a mood for argument. Besides, he was just drunk enough to be abusive.

“You blanked half-breed!” he spat out. “You can’t talk to me like that.”

“I can say anything to you I can back up with my fists, Fetter,” Longfoot told him. “Pick up your peavey and get to work or I’ll do something to you besides talk.”

This was fighting language. It could not be passed over in such a crowd of men as this.

Most of the men who had been causing trouble on this day were near at hand. John Longfoot looked them over with particular scrutiny.

“There are half a dozen of you right here that need a derved good trouncing,” he said deliberately. “I hate a skunk—and you fellows have been behaving like skunks. If you don’t want to work on this drive, why don’t you say so and get out? As it is, you are deliberately robbing me, for you are not giving me the worth of my money.”

The words cut. Longfoot was intentionally baiting the crowd. He knew their temper.

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The river was on the rise, and the logs were ready for launching. If these slackers were allowed to continue their present tactics the drive would be retarded and a dozen jams on the river would be the result. Rivermen dislike very much seeing the logs of a drive pile up and clog the waterway.

There had risen a general growl of objection from the group of which Fetter was a member at Longfoot's brusque criticism. It would seem that the boss was looking for trouble and the men, with the fumes of alcohol in their brains, were easily aroused.

"You blanked half-breed!" spat out Fetter again. "For two cents——"

Longfoot reached for him, grabbed hold of his flannel shirt, and fairly jerked Fetter to his toes as he pulled him forward.

"Don't hold yourself too cheap, Fetter," advised John Longfoot. "Two cents isn't much."

With the flat of his hand he delivered a stinging blow upon either side of the man's head and then flung him heavily to the ground.

"Take a feller your size, boss!" shouted a big man, starting forward.

"And I am glad to take you on, Jansen!" cried Longfoot. "I'd rather fight you than waste my money on you. The whole bunch of you quitters aren't worth two-bits a day!"

He had them all going then. They were just

drunk enough to consider themselves grossly insulted. Before Jansen could come within arm's reach of Longfoot three others tried to pile into the fight.

Big Steve M'Graw came running. Some of the more sober men would have interfered.

"Keep out of this!" commanded John Longfoot. "This is a private war. If I want any help I'll call for it."

He had already downed Jansen with a straight punch that would have felled an ox. The big Swede lay where he fell and received upon his bruised and shaken body, acting as a cushion, Smedley, Pierre the Canadian, and Jumper Briggs, who were knocked down in one, two, three order by the tall timberman.

Fetter was up and at him again. His nose and mouth were streaming blood, for John Longfoot's hand was heavy, and he was half crying with rage and pain.

"I'll kill you! I'll kill you, you blanked half-breed!" he bawled, and made for Longfoot again.

"You need something more than a thrashing, after all, Fetter," cried his conqueror. "You need to be cooled off."

He grabbed the fellow by the waistband of his trousers, raised him high above his head, and flung him violently over the brink of the bank into the riotous water.

"Spear him out, Steve, before he swallows more



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water than has gone down his gullet in a dog's age," commanded Longfoot. Then to the abashed four who were slowly climbing to their feet: "How about it, boys? Shall I toss you into the drink, or will you go to work right and proper?"

"By gar!" said the Canadian, suddenly laughing, "it is to work or take the water cure, eh? I nevair like water mooch, me—not even for a chaser."

"You bane fine fighter, Yon," growled Jansen, but with an admiration that was not grudging.

"Fetter, my bébé, he will be the bettair for vork, too, eh?" went on Pierre cheerfully. "Come on, boys! I bow to the Frenchman, John Longfoot. I can forget his red ancestry, eh? For it is the French in him that fights, by gar!"

The trouble was over. Another boss might have discharged and paid off these men, and perhaps have crippled the drive. But Longfoot knew them—had worked with them—was one of them. If mind power was not acknowledged among these fellows, brawn was!

Longfoot did prodigious labor himself. Down at the mill the booms were ready for the drive, and the river was running full. The worst patch of "white water" was just below the spot where they launched the logs. "White water" was really a misnomer for the condition of the stream, but it was plain why the river was called "Brindle."

"Looks like a brindled cat having a fit, sure enough," declared Sam Killock, watching the yellow and black water boil and foam over and around the boulders. "Well, boys, many a log drive has gone through that rip before, and where one log's gone another can be pushed. Come on, boys!"

On a rising flood the crew now worked like Trojans, launching log after log, some of them unusually long and three feet thick at the butt. Sam led the workers at the rolling; Stetter, though short of breath, went to the foot of the rapids and advised the younger men; John Longfoot strode along the half mile of bank overlooking the white water, jumping on the logs when a jam threatened, and inspiring the whole crew to gigantic efforts by his personal example. His popularity had been much enhanced by his method of handling the slackers.

They rolled the last log into the stream an hour before sunset. Longfoot leaped upon it and rode the "wooden horse" straight through the whirlpools, starting stranded timbers here and there, and making a final clean-up of the whole drive.

Two miles below the rapids a temporary boom held the thousands of sticks. This boom would be cut at daybreak, and from that point to the mill would be clean and clear sailing. There was plenty of water to drive the logs through if not another drop of rain fell.

"And you come back from New York, John, just

in time. We're in for a dry spell, and no two ways about it," puffed Eben Stetter, at the extremely early breakfast the next morning. "I seen it comin' this long time."

"You seen it comin'!" croaked Neb Crane. "Hi! Yi! I bet it rains cats and dogs before night."

"That's all you know about it!" exclaimed Stetter, taking fire instantly. "Weather looks just like it did the spring Limpy Hicks found pay-dirt over to Bobcat Bar—and that spring was as dry as dust."

"*Who* found *what*?" gasped Crane, almost falling off the bench.

"I tell you that was the driest spring we ever had in this county."

"I don't know how dry it was, nor I don't know how wet it was," Crane said, with deep scorn in his voice and manner. "But I know who 'twas first struck pay-dirt at Bobcat Bar. And 'twasn't Limpy Hicks, nor nobody that looked like him."

"What d'you mean?" wheezed Stetter. "Think I don't know nothin'?"

"I know you don't know nothin'. Not when you talk about Limpy Hicks cradling color first at Bobcat Bar. 'Twas Powerson—Bill Powerson—struck that lucky pocket. And 'twasn't nothin' more than a pocket, either."

"Powerson! Whoo!" gasped his fat friend. "You're crazy, Neb."

"Not so's they'll put me behind the bars for it,"

declared Crane, with the most exasperating confidence. "I'll leave it to Sam, here, if it wasn't Powerson that showed us the first handful of placer ever cradled at Bobcat."

"You're caught there, by gravy!" crowed Stetter. "I'll leave it to Sam, too. Him and me and Limpy Hicks was talkin' about it one day—le's see. Why, 'twasn't ten year ago. Ain't I right, Sam?"

"Ain't I right, Sam?" echoed Ned Crane, his whiskers bristling.

"You're both wrong—same's usual," declared the "know-it-all," his good eye glaring just as fixedly as his glass one. "You're both wrong. 'Twas the Hemdigger twins found the first color at Bobcat Bar—and they thought they had a ten strike. Limpy Hicks and Powerson were both 'also rans'—like we was in that rush."

"Why, you're crazy!" barked Crane. "I tell you, Powerson——"

"Limpy Hicks showed me his gold," gasped Stetter. "I don't know which of you is craziest—Neb, or you, Sam."

"You left it to me to settle, didn't you?" demanded the cockatoo-man judicially. "Well, I've settled it. It was the Hemdigger twins—Tom and Jerry."

"Hi! Yi!" yelled Neb Crane. "Them wasn't their names in the first place. One was Jed and t'other was Tim."

"There you go again," wheezed Eben Stetter.

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"Just as wrong about that as you are about everything else. The Hemdiggers was named Bart and Henry."

And when the trio finally took the back trail for their little farmstead over in Breakaway, they were arguing about the color of the boots the Hemdigger twins wore.

The chuck wagon was driven out to the tote road and the camp abandoned. Longfoot had two good men to start the drive to the mill, while he covered the last spark of fire and looked over the camp site to make sure that all was cleared up. He was prepared to take the down-river trail when a drifting speck far up the river caught his eye.

It was much too early in the season for sportsmen to appear; and all the natives knew that there were no fish to be caught at this time of the spring freshet. Besides, there were too many hidden snags in the boisterous stream for an amateur to paddle a frail craft.

There was a six mile stretch of straightaway river to the northward, but an elbow hid all that lay more than half a mile below the spot where Longfoot stood. A few birch trees fringed the edge of the stream, and,

"Like beggared princes of the wood  
In silver rags the birches stood."

He tore off a strip of the hanging bark, rolled it into a cylinder, and peered through it at the speck tossing upon the river's bosom. It was a canoe. A little figure manned it, and he could see the flash of the paddle in the sunlight.

"Gypsy," he whispered.

She was coming down stream with the flood, using the paddle only now and then to steady and guide her bark. It was a daring thing to do, but Gypsy's superabundance of energy was constantly urging her into peril. That she escaped danger with marvelous facility made her escapades no less startling to her friends. Si Patterson had been wont to declare that the girl was born like a cat—with nine lives.

The yellow-black water threatened disaster in every square yard of its foam-streaked surface between the point where Longfoot stood and the darting speck of color so far away. Besides the threatening boulders that cluttered the stream, drifting logs were sometimes thrown up out of the boiling flood for half their length, and at times, colliding with each other, their bark was stripped to ribbons, the logs flashing white and splintered in the sunlight.

Longfoot, in his anxiety, began to stride up the riverbank. If she was venturing down the stream on some real errand, rather than in a spirit of bravado, he might stop her before she got into

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actual trouble. She handled her craft with much skill, and while he covered an eighth of a mile through the fringe of brush along the bank, Gypsy's canoe ran half the distance which had separated them, and more.

There was a sand bar thrust out from the opposite shore—a spit that in the ordinary state of the stream offered a dry bridge to the bank. But now the higher end of it was isolated, the water brawling between it and the shore.

Long before he came opposite to the patch of sand he saw something move upon it—an animal of some kind. It crouched there in terror of the waters, unable to get ashore until the flood decreased—marooned, it seemed, by the freshet.

"It's a bobcat," Longfoot decided, firm in this conviction despite his distance from the bar.

Gypsy's canoe was nearing the sand bar rapidly. Avoiding out-thrust boulders, and half-hidden snags as well, the girl darted her canoe this way and that with almost the precision and swiftness of those water insects that skim the surface of more quiet pools. She escaped disaster, it seemed, by a miracle at every turn. The bare touch of one of the logs or rocks she eluded would have crushed the canoe and crumpled it like paper.

She was stationed well in the stern of the craft, her curls flying loosely behind her on the wind of her passing, unhatted, and with a flush in her coun-

tenance that Longfoot could already see. She was thoroughly enjoying the adventure.

The big bobcat on the sand bar saw her coming, and he rose up, arched his back, and spat spitefully. Longfoot could not hear the girl's shout as she flaunted her paddle at the angry creature. The bobcat jumped to the end of the bar and appeared to be tempted to leap into the canoe as it was whirled closer.

A bobcat will seldom attack man unless it be a female with kittens to defend or it is cornered and cannot escape. This animal might consider the bobbing canoe a means of escape from the sand bar, however. And without doubt its temper was aflame.

Longfoot's admiration for Gypsy's skill with the paddle was unbounded. She shot the canoe around the point of the sand bar. Then he uttered a cry of warning and alarm. Gypsy had thrust her craft into the backwater below the spit and leaned side-wise to strike at the snarling bobcat with her paddle.

It was a piece of impudent daring. The creature was crouched for a spring into her canoe. For a moment Gypsy's laughing face came within the focus of Longfoot's vision. She had no idea, of course, that he was on the opposite side of the river, or that she was observed by anybody.

She had absolutely no thought of fear, but continued to tantalize and enrage the bobcat. Her keen



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eyes and supple body she thought the equal of any bobcat alive. If it leaped she would meet it in full charge with the paddle.

But John Longfoot apprehended a peril that Gypsy did not heed. A long log that had been following in the wake of the girl's canoe shot past the end of the spit and collided head-on with a boulder twenty feet below the girl. The log halted and shivered as though a thing alive; then, instead of sliding on and by the obstruction, it caught in some way, its loose end swinging towards the canoe and the unconscious girl in it.

Longfoot realized that shouting to Gypsy was useless. Indeed, even could he have made his voice heard, to startle her might open the way for an attack by the wildcat that she could not avert.

The timberman had brought no peavey with him, but in his belt was thrust a small, keen-bladed axe. His quick glance selected the sapling he wanted, and a few strides brought him to it.

Two blows severed the sapling at its base, and he trimmed it and cut off the top as he bounded to the overhanging boulder which he had already chosen. From it he had a clear view of the scene at the sand spit half way across the river.

The log swung slowly, but it nevertheless imperiled the girl if she was not warned, and he could not make her hear.

The water ruffled over the stick, foaming and

angry. Gypsy's back was toward Longfoot, for she must keep her eyes fixed upon the enraged bobcat. She parried the creature's blows with the paddle. Having once got the canoe safely below the sand spit she considered her position impregnable.

But the swinging log was aimed to clear the end of the spit, though not the stern of her canoe. One blade thrust in the brawling stream would have driven the light craft to safety, but of her danger from the rear she did not dream.

The butt of the log would shear off the stern of the craft, and Gypsy would find herself in another moment waist deep in the flood, with the bobcat to challenge any attempt she might make to land on the sand bar.

## CHAPTER VII

### INTO PERIL AND OUT

JOHN LONGFOOT thrust the butt of the sapling far out into the river, found a secure foundation for it, and vaulted toward a boulder that reared its flat head above the surface of the brawling stream in the semblance of some amphibious animal. He flew through the air like a huge bat and landed with ringing calks upon the rock.

But the boisterous river drowned any sound he might make. The screeching voice of the bobcat was not even audible to his ears. The roar of the waters, the recurrent clash of log upon log, the splitting collisions of the drift with the rocks in the river's bed smothered all less strident sounds.

Nevertheless John Longfoot shrieked to Gypsy. As he pulled free the supple vaulting-pole, the swinging log was all but upon the canoe.

"Gypsy! Look behind! Hi!"

It was a waste of effort. The log grounded for a few seconds upon the tip of the sand spit. Gypsy remained oblivious to both it and to Longfoot's presence. She got in a good stroke with the flat

of her paddle, which knocked the snarling bobcat half a dozen feet away.

But the beast came back. Gypsy laughed confidently, and thrust the paddle against the sand to push her canoe out of the creature's reach, for it was now so greatly enraged that it appeared determined to board the craft.

Longfoot had thrust his pole forward and settled it behind the swinging log. The moment before he cast himself into the air the end of the log tore loose and was slammed against the canoe.

The stern of the light craft crumpled as though it were made of paper. Gypsy must have screamed, but Longfoot did not hear her voice as the broken canoe filled and sank under her. The girl was plunged into the flood, and when she staggered to her feet there was the bobcat, claws distended and teeth displayed, at the edge of the stream to meet her.

The surging water rolled the canoe over and over. The girl was overturned again, and disappeared beneath the surface of the boisterous stream. She struggled up, gasping and chilled, and without even the paddle with which to ward off the bobcat's attack.

But John Longfoot was now in the air. She saw his flying shadow and looked up with a cry of terror upon her lips, fearing an attack from above.

By two enormous leaps the timberman had

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crossed the river to the end of the sand spit. He landed just at the water's edge, his caked boots sinking deep into the wet sand. Struggling forward, bare-handed and weaponless, he charged the bobcat and drove it back along the bar with wild yells.

Coming to the place where Gypsy still struggled with the flood, he waded into the waist-deep water and seized her.

"Oh, John!" she shrieked, "you are a friend in need."

"That cat might have got you, to say nothing of the log," he shouted in return. "You'd no business in that canoe at flood-time."

"I never will be in it again," she rejoined, and he read the words on her lips rather than actually hearing her. She looked ruefully down stream at the spot where the wreck had disappeared.

"You ought to know better, Gypsy."

"Now, don't scold!" she begged, her wet and piquant face so near to his that the big fellow caught his breath and leashed with difficulty his desire to caress her.

She was such a little thing! He held her close as he heaved himself out upon the sand spit. Once ashore, she wriggled out of his arms, laughing up at him, and tossed back her drenched hair.

"Now what will we do?" she demanded.

"Get you to a fire and into dry clothing as quickly as possible," he said with some grimness.

"It's—it's a far way to Paradise, John," she sug-

gested, "and it's on the other side of the river, too." Already she was shaking with the chill of her submersion.

"And our camp is abandoned," he told her. "There would be nothing there to put around you while your clothes dried. I'll have to take you to my shack, Gypsy. That's the nearest place."

"But how will we get away from here, John?" she asked. "Oh! Look out for that bobcat!"

He turned with that swiftness that seemed so remarkable in such a big man. The snarling bobcat charged, and Longfoot received it on the toe of his boot.

Yelling in its surprise and pain, the cat whirled over and over in the air, sprawling finally at a distance with all the fight taken out of it.

"You'd no business to have mixed up with that creature, Gypsy," the man said. "He might have clawed you, and their claws are as poison as toadstools."

"Don't scold me, John," begged Gypsy again.

He turned once more toward her and smiled comfortingly. Then he realized that, with all her pluck, she was shaking with cold and weakness and had put a hand on his arm to steady herself.

With a half-smothered cry he swept her into his arms. Her body relaxed against his with perfect assurance that Longfoot's strength would be devoted to her welfare.

He strode along the sand bar with her toward its

shoreward end. The whining bobcat, licking its broken leg, shrank away from him without offering to attack again. Longfoot knew that the channel between the end of the bar and the riverbank was both deep and swift; but that knowledge did not deter him.

He ventured in, holding Gypsy high upon his shoulder. She clutched at his coat collar with a suddenly vigorous hand, and gasped as Longfoot plunged into the flood. Perhaps she had not been altogether as much overcome by her struggle in the river as had first appeared.

But she could never have got ashore by herself. John Longfoot once went as deep as his armpits—and held her in both hands above his head. Gypsy had completely recovered her self-possession and did not cry out.

He made the steep bank without an oversight and clambered up to a level footing. Gypsy would have slipped to the ground again, but Longfoot would not allow her to do so.

"I am going to travel faster than you could keep up," he told her. "It is three miles or more to my cabin, and I am as wet as a drowned rat, myself. Hold hard, Gypsy! We are going to travel."

"Don—don't shake m—me—to pieces, John!" she cried as he set out at a wolf-trot up the riverbank with the girl on his shoulder as though she were a doll.

But the timberman was serious. The spring wind was raw; and he felt the chill of it through his own heavy clothing. He realized that she was shaking like an aspen. He halted, drew off his coat, and despite her protestations wrapped it around her. All below the shoulders the mackinaw was saturated; but it was of wool and it covered Gypsy almost from neck to heel.

The timberman strode on with scarcely another moment's hesitation until he sighted his own cabin set amid a windbreak of evergreens on the northern side of an old gash in the high bluff of the river-bank. John Longfoot's home, from without, was a very lonely looking domicile.

But when he had flung open the door and hastily placed Gypsy in a cushioned Morris chair within, she looked about upon a much more comfortable—even luxurious—abode than one would have suspected was here from an out-of-door inspection.

There was a fire already laid on the stone hearth. A handful of fat-pine splinters, when touched by a match, flashed into eager flame and caught the kindling wood. In half a minute the fire was roaring and the flames licking the back log hungrily.

He pushed the big chair nearer to the hearth and then disappeared into his sleeping room. From thence he returned shortly with an armful of warm clothing which he threw in a heap beside the shaking girl.



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"Here's a rough towel, Gypsy. Give yourself a good rub-down and then get into these clothes—all you can get on you. I'll come back and make tea just as soon as you are dressed again."

"But, John," she cried, "they are all a mile too big for me."

"What do you care? There are not even squirrels and rabbits in here to see you. And you'll catch your death of cold if you don't get dry and warm at once."

"I'm not so easily killed, John," she chattered.

"Never can tell. This is altogether too early in the season for a swim in old Brindle. If you caught cold and died, Gypsy, what would us folks around here do?"

"Why, John, would you really care so much?" she demanded, flashing him a sudden sparkling glance.

"Would we? Well!" His eyes spoke volumes even if his tongue only added as he started for the door:

"I'll be at the wood pile. Call me when you are dressed, for I want to change my own things."

In ten minutes she "hoo-hooed" from the cabin door, and Longfoot, who had been swinging the axe as a warming-up exercise, hurried within to find her a wonderful bundle of men's habiliments, truly a world too wide. Her laughing face at one end of the rough clothing reassured him.

"Come on, John. I'm a sight for gods and men, am I not?"

"I don't know about the gods, Gypsy," he returned, gazing upon her with such open adoration that she began to blush.

She had laid the towel across her shoulders and on it spread her wet curls. To cover her momentary confusion she turned to the kettle already bubbling over the red flames.

"Where is the tea, John? I'll make it while you change," she said.

He told her, and entered the other room to pull off his half-dried garments. Wool next to the skin is the usual precaution of the lumberman against chilling dips in the river. There had been times when John Longfoot worked all day and half the night on a log drive, saturated to the skin.

Presently both he and Gypsy were sipping strong and scalding-hot tea before the leaping flames on the hearth, and any possible chill was soon driven out of their young and healthy bodies. The girl looked like some sort of Teddy-bear in his voluminous shirt and brown overalls. Her slender little feet, as pink as a baby's, peeped out of a pair of Longfoot's moccasins.

Like Gypsy herself, the timberman possessed some little education, and he had more than the popular "five foot shelf" of books on the wall. Still, such culture as he had gained would not have car-

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ried him far in a city. His books—aside from a few classics—were mostly upon topics of woodlore. The forest was his world, and he craved to learn all there was to know about it in addition to the instinctive knowledge that came to him through his blood.

Beside the books upon his wall there hung a fiddle. He took it down when the tea was finished, and, cuddling the instrument under his chin, began to play at Gypsy's behest while she spread and re-spread her wearing apparel in the heat of the fire.

He played bits of music he had heard and remembered. A few ballads he had learned completely; but most of his playing was a medley of old-time hoe-downs and jig music that he had picked up from the itinerant players he had heard at country dances or in lumber camps.

"You should get some good music and practice, John," the girl said, smiling. "You have a natural talent, I do believe."

"I can't read a note," he objected. "You know how it is. I don't have time for such study."

"No. You are too sharp after money—just like so many other people, John," she rejoined, with some little tartness. "I don't see why you should be avaricious. You don't even want to doll up for the squirrels and rabbits."

"Perhaps I am miserly," he agreed after a moment; but he did not look at her. Then: "It must be hereditary. My Grandmother Petrie had three

English shillings hid away in a cracked teapot when she died."

The girl laughed rather ruefully and stared at him with her chin in her cupped hands as he played. By and by her garments were dry and she changed to them in Longfoot's bedroom. Gypsy knew that he should be on his way to the Junction, following the log-drive.

"Just paddle me across the river, John," she said, coming forth once more clothed in her own garments.

"Better stay to dinner, Gypsy," he said, stirring the contents of a pot hung over the fire. "Going to have venison stew, Injun style," and he dropped into the simmering mess a handful of dry herbs.

"No. You are too busy to entertain company. And Aunt Tabby will be expecting me. I'm late now, and she may be worried. I only meant to paddle down to see if you had floated all your logs."

"Right reckless of you," he rejoined, as they left the cabin.

"Pooh!" she said. "You know I have all kinds of luck, John. But I did lose a perfectly good canoe. Didn't expect to do that."

He paddled her across to the east bank of the river, where she leaped out lightly, waved her hand to him, and instantly disappeared beyond the fringe of brush.

John Longfoot had no idea, as he returned to his

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side of the river, that Gypsy watched him through the screen of bushes until he had lifted out his canoe and climbed the hill to his cabin.

Once within, he picked up the fiddle, sank into the big chair in which Gypsy had lain so cozily, and began to play once more while his dinner simmered in the pot.

He did not play a lively air now that she was gone.

## CHAPTER VIII

### ON THE VERGE

H. HARVEY STAFFORD was the most abstemious man in Wall Street until five o'clock in the afternoon. Even the luncheon he chose for himself when he was Grace Lemoyne's host on the day John Longfoot had come first into their ken was as simple as the refecton of an ascetic.

The display he had made of bad temper at the conclusion of his interview with the man from Tall Timber may have been not altogether unstudied. It was possible that the head of the American Consolidated Timber Corporation wished John Longfoot to take back with him to the woods a certain fear of the powerful corporation and its president.

It was to be supposed that a man such as John Longfoot apparently was—a more or less ignorant half-breed Indian—might be easily brow-beaten and intimidated. If that belief had been the spur of Stafford's explosion, he had yet to understand John Longfoot.

Or was it that the scorn of a liar he had seen in the eyes of the man from Tall Timber had really got under Stafford's skin?

However, the latter had his temper perfectly in leash when he met Grace Lemoyne before Rotelli's shop, as had been shown. He could listen to the tale of her adventure into which Longfoot had entered with that quiet cynicism which marked his attitude on most occasions when Grace grew over enthusiastic.

Not that he was not fond of the girl—the daughter of one of his father's old partners. He was fond of her. Grace Lemoyne was quite the type of woman he most admired. She was ultra-smart, with a surface brilliancy that appealed to the shallow mind of the money-getter. He could not easily appreciate any deeper feminine nature than that of Miss Lemoyne.

To him woman was a plaything—a more or less expensive toy. And when he was ready to marry, Grace was the kind of girl he would choose—socially brilliant, physically beautiful, and wearing expensive clothes and jewels to the very best advantage. If the man's highest use for a wife was as a show window to display his wealth, this girl was exactly fitted to his desire.

There was one other reason for H. Harvey Stafford marrying Grace Lemoyne. In dying, Loraine Lemoyne had left his affairs somewhat involved and had made Henry Stafford, his life-long friend and partner, sole administrator of his estate.

The A.C.T.C. had not been on a firm foundation

at the time of Lemoyne's death. It had bulked big as a future, but had cost the organizers of the corporation every penny they were able to scrape together.

If Grace married another man than H. Harvey Stafford, the husband might delve too deeply into the management of the Lemoyne estate, and ask pertinent questions as to why the widow and daughter of Loraine Lemoyne were scrimped for spending money, while the other partners in the organization of the corporation had now amassed millions.

Altogether, society's acceptance of the probable engagement of H. Harvey Stafford and Grace Lemoyne suited the man quite as well as it did the girl. She was really as fond of him as she could be of anybody save herself. On his part—Well, after all, Stafford did not demand much of a woman. Grace satisfied him.

He was a generous host, and she appreciated his taste in the selection of her more elaborate luncheon. He listened to her chatter, smoking a cigarette or two with nonchalance. No one would have dreamed, to see him, that H. Harvey Stafford's mind was fretted by business secrets so important that because of them the future stability of the A.C.T.C. trembled in the balance.

Even while he sat at the restaurant table his thought, reverting to the documents in his private safe, was suddenly quickened by a startling con-



sideration. John Longfoot had mentioned the inability of Si Patterson's partners to find the deeds of certain of Patterson's timber claims. But, were properly made out deeds to those particular timberlands among the documents Stafford had shuffled at his desk an hour before?

When he returned to his office after putting Grace into her limousine, his first act was to open the safe again and dig out the papers referring to the combination of the Tall Timber holdings and the organization of the corporation. He knew well enough that the lawyer who had written most of the deeds, the men purporting to make them, and the witnesses to the signatures thereto, could not now be found.

At one side of the office was a map-stand, and to this he had recourse, extending the huge map of the Tall Timber region clear across the board. Everything on his desk he neglected while he compared document after document with the boundaries of the different colored patches on the map.

There were errors here which he had not even suspected before. How careless his father and his associates had been in the old days when they gathered in these timberlands! Of course, they depended upon the well-known fact of the fire that had destroyed the old records to excuse all seeming discrepancies in the deeds.

H. Harvey Stafford's keen mind could not over-

look, however, the fact that a well-informed and careful legal intelligence would not fail to mark the differences in these boundaries. He did not, of course, fear "that half-breed Indian," as he scornfully thought of John Longfoot.

But suppose the man from Tall Timber applied to an investigator who was smart enough to scrutinize the A.C.T.C. claims rather than to search for the possible holdings of the dead and gone Si Patterson? This thought it was that had set H. Harvey Stafford his afternoon's task and brought him finally to a certain troublesome conclusion.

His father, Anson Bass, John Doherty, and Grace Lemoyne's father had all been over confident that the boundaries of the mapped timberlands claimed by the A.C.T.C. never would be questioned.

The matter of the several deeds transferring the lands to the corporation did not trouble Stafford even now. The men named in the transfers could not now be found in Tall Timber, if ever they had been there. Longfoot admitted that Si Patterson's deeds had not been discovered, and they certainly had not been put on record since the fire that had swept away the County Court House.

But these boundaries! That was another matter altogether. He found discrepancies in the deeds of the A.C.T.C. holdings on this afternoon which left huge tracts which were policed by the corporation's

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wardens out of bounds. Some of these strips of timber Stafford knew were the very pieces to which Si Patterson had always laid claim.

Henry Stafford had merely smiled at Patterson's claims and written the old timberman soothing words. "He'll soon pass up his chips," he had often said, "and then there will be nobody to bother about the matter."

The elder Stafford had not known about Si Patterson's adopted daughter, and he had surely never heard of John Longfoot. Henry Harvey Stafford had that to face of which the older Henry had not dreamed.

Different from his father, the present president of the A.C.T.C. was not of too sanguine a temperament. He always faced a difficulty squarely; met it, indeed, with a full appreciation of all its disastrous possibilities. He met this emergency in just this comprehensive way.

He was all-powerful in the American Consolidated Timber Corporation. Nobody questioned the president's actions—what he did, or how he did it. His directors were merely figureheads. The stockholders asked for nothing from H. Harvey Stafford but dividends.

This was not an emergency calling for discussion. It was up to him to handle the matter alone. By his judgment, and by his alone, the A.C.T.C. was bound to win or lose. He could look to no

source for advice save to his own scheming brain.

He left the office later than usual that afternoon. Nobody ever saw H. Harvey Stafford take a drink during business hours nor within the Wall Street district. But at a famous caravansary uptown he dismissed his taxicab and entered the bar.

One of the white-jacketed servitors saw him and immediately set out a tall bar-glass with a little crushed ice in it. He selected a pint bottle of a certain brand of the wine of Champagne, broke the wires, and carefully coaxed out the cork, which came forth with a sharp little "plop!" dear to the thirsty soul of the winebibber.

The bartender poured a few drops of the wine into a whisky glass to prove that it was not "corky," then the pint foamed and bubbled into the tall drinking glass. Stafford's heavy face lightened even before he put his lips to this first libation of the evening.

Usually he drank nothing more save at dinner. To-night, however, he ate a bite in the café and drank several insidious concoctions of the hotel's most famous "mixer." He had promised Grace to go to the theater, and there would perforce be a heavy supper afterward. Stafford allowed himself but two good meals each day—breakfast, which he never missed, and dinner at night, or supper at a later hour.

He timed himself to arrive at his apartment in

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season to change into evening dress and then meet Grace and her mother in the lobby of the theater. It was a musical show—one of those girl and slapstick affairs which could never by any possibility satisfy a cultivated audience.

Stafford sat in the box so that his heavy shoulders were frankly turned to the stage. He had no interest in the girls who cavorted there. This girl so close to him was far more entrancing and titillating to his emotions.

Her bared arms and dimpled shoulders, beautifully molded, as fragrant as a flower, pleased the man's senses already excited by the alcohol in his veins. Her smile, her coquettish glance, spurred him to express in his eyes the desire that pleased her.

For Grace Lemoyne loved to be admired by men. She sought their open approval—either verbal or by bold glances; and nothing less satisfied her.

Stafford's heated desires tempted him to seize her in his arms and caress her—roughly, sentimentally! He wanted to kiss her arms, her shoulders, her rosy lips—kiss, and kiss, and kiss until he was sated. But he crowded down all these feelings as he kept in leash much of the raw man which lay at all times close beneath his veneer of culture.

Mrs. Lemoyne was a perfect chaperone. She never saw either of her charges on such occasions as this. She possessed the proper matronly air to

serve all purposes, but strictly minded her own affairs.

She was a dressy woman, and fat. Her skin was coarse and absorbed an enormous amount of tinted powder. When she moved it seemed to fly about her in a dim cloud. How her daughter came to possess such exquisite skin and such a look of perfect grooming was a mystery. To tell the truth, Loraine Lemoyne, of French Canadian stock himself, had found his good lady cooking for a crew in a lumber camp. All the refinements of the years that had passed since then could not wholly deceive the scrutiny of the wise in Mrs. Lemoyne's case.

She understood quite well enough that only by keeping H. Harvey Stafford interested in Grace would she and her daughter enjoy many luxuries that their small income could never rightfully compass. Their smart little limousine, the chauffeur who drove it, the luxury of an English butler and a French maid, would never be theirs if Stafford did not good-naturedly stretch their drawing account from the A.C.T.C.

That her husband, or his estate, had been deliberately cheated by his more clever partners in the organization of the timber corporation, Mrs. Lemoyne did not doubt. But she knew, too, that she could prove no wrongdoing. She did not propose to antagonize H. Harvey Stafford; and like so many American mothers of a certain class, she

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believed firmly that her daughter could take care of herself.

If she could once see Grace and Stafford married her own future comforts would be assured, and the girl's as well. Grace was sophisticated enough, Mrs. Lemoyne was confident, to accept marriage and a husband in the proper way. In these days one must not be too exacting. Men—especially men like H. Harvey Stafford—must be held on an easy rein.

“‘Give and take’ has always been my motto,” remarked the easy-going Mrs. Lemoyne. “The old-fashioned domestic virtues are no longer expected in wives. And virtue of no kind must be insisted upon in husbands!”

Brought up in this atmosphere one might not expect too much of Grace Lemoyne. And yet she was not at all spoiled at the core. Her acceptance of the world as she found it—her world—and its follies and shams, was only to be expected. She was very selfish and quite self-centered; but perhaps that very fact was to be her salvation.

They went to a restaurant that boasted a midnight revue of the baser sort—where scantily attired girls danced between the tables and the air was heavily perfumed. There Stafford drank more wine with his meal. Its effect upon him, as upon many men, was to expand him, to make him more jovial, even more kindly. It is a fact that without the urge of a certain amount of alcohol some men would never gain a reputation for good-nature.

H, Harvey Stafford was one of these. Dead sober, he was a money-getter and little else. He held his irritability in check for business purposes, but had he followed the dictates of his nature he would have been anything but the suave and courteous man he appeared, for instance, during most of his interview with John Longfoot.

Now there was a mood upon him that warned the shrewd Mrs. Lemoyne to give him all the leash possible with Grace. She saw people whom she knew at several tables and went about the restaurant to visit with them, leaving Grace and Stafford together.

On some such occasion as this, she was sure, Stafford would urge Grace to set the wedding day and allow the engagement to be published. A man of Stafford's age and character had none of the impetuosity of the boy-lover—no, indeed! Stafford must be trapped, and the bait which would tempt him must be very carefully displayed.

Grace was enjoying herself to the full. She had thus far shown no facet of her nature that demanded anything higher in the way of amusement than the play they had seen and the creature comforts before her. She had a healthy appetite and a wonderful digestion which needed no stimulant. She only sipped her wine. Her mind was set entirely upon what the future had in store for her.

"You will be at the Tennant's party Friday night, won't you, Harvey?" she asked.



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For a moment he became ruminative. "I am not sure," he said at length.

"Oh! Yes! Please do! Just for me, Harvey."

"I am in a mood to please you if I can," he said, smiling at her. "But I may not be in New York."

"Oh! Business?"

"Very much so. And I don't know how long I shall be gone."

"Dear me, Harvey! A mystery?" she cried, sparkling again. "Do tell me. I love a secret."

"I fear I have a trip West before me."

"Indeed?"

"To Tall Timber. That damned half-breed that came on here——"

"Oh! that perfectly wonderful man, Harvey?" she cried. "I wish you could have seen him lift my car."

"I saw all I wished to of your human derrick," retorted Stafford, for a moment under a cloud. "Well, I don't see now anything else to do but to go to Tall Timber myself and try to straighten things out."

"Oh, dear! Is it quite necessary?" she pursued.

"I fear so. You know, 'If you want a thing done well, do it yourself'. I could send nobody. This is too serious a matter to trust to a subordinate."

"Will you be gone long, Harvey?" she asked, rather wistfully. "You know I never have much fun unless you are around."

"You are flattering me," he laughed.

"No, truly. You'll return soon?"

"That I cannot tell now. I will give out that I am taking a vacation. It must not seem to be merely a business trip. Ugh! And no comforts! You should see that place—Tall Timber Junction—Grace. It is the limit!"

Had he not imbibed more than his usual modicum of wine he would not have opened his business heart, even in this degree, to Grace Lemoyne.

"I shall really miss you dreadfully, Harvey," she repeated with a warmth that he was only too willing to believe was real.

When they arrived at the small but very good apartment the Lemoynes occupied on Park Avenue, he went in with them for a moment. Mrs. Lemoyne at once disappeared and saw to it that "the young people," as she expansively called them, had the reception room to themselves.

"You'll drop an occasional line?" Grace said.

"I shan't forget you—never fear," he told her, patting her shoulder as she stood close to him. When she allowed her wrap to slip away he patted the cool, silky flesh above the line of her bodice. She did not withdraw from him, but instead raised her face with her lips invitingly close.

He bent to her, barely touching her lips with his own. The fragrance and coolness of her caress was delicious. Passion flared into his eyes again; but

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he checked the impulse he felt to seize her in his arms.

"Good-bye, Grace, if I don't see you again before I leave," he said calmly.

"Good-night, Harvey. Write to me," she repeated, and watched him go through the hall and let himself out of the apartment.

She stood a long time with her lower lip caught between her teeth.

"A sweet girl—really charming," was Stafford's muttered comment, as he descended with the sleepy operator in the elevator car.

But once out upon the street, with the chill wind of early morning blowing upon him, his brain cleared almost instantly of these tender thoughts, and even his passions were driven to heel.

"Damn that half-breed!" was his next and audible thought. "I must go out there—yes. I've got to find the man who can help me, personally. This is too serious a matter to trust to any subordinate. It's my job," and he pressed on toward his own apartment, his mind functioning quite in its usual way.

## CHAPTER IX

### IN THE BALANCE

THE maple leaves were now the size of a squirrel's ear. The sun flung handfuls of gold through the huge umbrellas of these red maples and sprinkled the short grass on the western slope of Paradise Knoll with a fretwork of light and shade.

The windbreak of the high knoll seemed to shut off the tall pines completely. Between Gypsy Patterson's home and Brindle River lay the maple wood, as open and as free of underbrush as though cleared by the hand of man.

Si Patterson had built his lodge in the wilderness to face the slope of this wood. It was all golden now at sunset, and this was the season of the year that the old timberman had best loved.

The rear of the house, including Aunt Tabby's kitchen, overlooked the cathedral-aisle pines and down into Breakaway where Si Patterson's three old partners dwelt. But the two women who now lived alone on Paradise Knoll, just under the overhang of its crown, spent the leisure hours of their afternoons on the west porch.

"Does seem a pretty springtime, after all," Aunt

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Tabby ruminated, as she rocked in a swaybacked chair and knitted contentedly. "Every time I see them trees bud and bloom and hear the frogs again I think it's a miracle."

"Why, Auntie, you'll come through many a winter yet," Gypsy said, laughing. "And what more do you want? You're already at Paradise."

"That's almost like flying in the face of Providence—callin' of the hill by such a name. But it looked like the Gates you read of in the Book when I first journeyed here—all golden glory from the setting sun. That was when Si first brought you home, honey."

"I know," sighed the girl. "He tried to manage me himself—he and the Uncles—all; but I was too much for them. He said he just had to have a woman. They none of them knew how to get my clothes off and on."

"True word! Man is a helpless critter, sure enough."

"And so he went clear to Blainesburg and kidnapped you," laughed Gypsy.

"Well, I'd heard 'bout you, and I wasn't so hard to urge," said the old woman. "I wanted to see you."

She was a full-bodied old person, and the chair complained as she rocked in it. Yet there did not seem to be anything ponderous about her in spite of her flesh. She moved quickly, her eyes were

bird-like in their sharp glances, and her fingers moved as nimbly over her work as Gypsy's own.

Aunt Tabby Murdock was a smiling, brown-faced woman, "rising seventy," she said, as hale and hearty as ever she had been, but inclined to consider it due her age to think and talk much of what the itinerant preachers who traveled through the region termed "her latter end."

"I expect," Gypsy said, smiling over her sewing, "that I was considerable of a sight."

"You was a sweet little thing; but dreadful scary," the woman went on. "Up to the time when I come here Si Patterson was the only one you'd let touch you without purty nigh screechin' your head off. Them other useless critters—Sam Killock and Neb Crane and Eben Stetter—stood around with their hands hangin' like they was a houn's ears. True word! Them three men can be the uselessest critters!"

"I expect I was a Tartar," sighed Gypsy.

"You was a tartar-emetic for them—near 'bout," chuckled Aunt Tabby. "And them four men was some sick—true word! But I soon made friends with you, you pore leetle baby-mite! Then that jam was done busted, and everything went through all right."

"Aunt Tabby," Gypsy asked thoughtfully—and she had asked the question before—"Aunt Tabby, wasn't there any mark on my clothing—or any-

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thing I wore—that might give a clue as to who I was?”

“Why, bless you, don’t trouble over that, honey. You’re Gypsy Patterson. Ain’t that enough?”

“I am only Gypsy Patterson by adoption. I had a name and a family—*folks*, you know—before Uncle Si found me. I sometimes wonder what my real name was—or is.”

“It was a young woman an’ sev’ral men who were killed over there on Eagle Ridge,” said Aunt Tabby. “They’d gone through Blainesburg the day before. I seen ’em. A right purty woman your ma was, honey——”

“If she really was my mother,” breathed Gypsy, neglecting her sewing to gaze down through the maple wood.

“I guess she was your ma all right. She and you stopped over night with the Selbys. She talked with Mary Ann Selby some.”

“Do you suppose the Selbys remember anything about that wagon train—where it was bound for and where the people came from?” Gypsy asked.

“Don’t know ’bout that. But how are you goin’ to find Mary Ann Selby? Steve, he up an’ died and I never did hear tell what become of Mary Ann. They kep’ sort of a tavern at Blainesburg. It wasn’t likely that your ma got re’l confidential with a woman like Mary Ann.”

“But maybe that young woman was not my

mother," Gypsy said, steadily. "She may have only had the care of me. Perhaps my own mother was already dead when that massacre took place. Or, perhaps——"

"Well, well! Perhaps what? You certain sure have got 'magination, honey."

"Maybe I had been taken away from my parents. I might have been stolen—kidnapped! Maybe those poor creatures who were killed by the bandits had no right to me."

"Then the Lord over-ruled an' punished 'em for their wickedness," broke in Aunt Tabby devoutly. "But there might be money comin' to you by rights," she added.

"Oh—money!"

"'Tain't nothin' to flout, Gypsy," said the old woman seriously. "'Money makes the mare go'—and the old hoss, too."

"Oh, I can work for my living," cried the girl energetically.

"Well, most of us does, one way or another," said the philosophical old woman. Then both went on sewing in silence for a time.

"You take them three old has-beens down there in Breakaway, for instance——" broke forth Aunt Tabby again apropos of nothing, it would seem, in their previous conversation.

"Why don't you take at least one of the Uncles—all, Aunt Tabby?" put in Gypsy roguishly. "You



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know each and every one of them is just honin' for you."

"My soul and body! At my age?" demanded the old woman, yet bridling. "If I've got to hobble on a crutch the rest o' my life I ain't goin' to pick me a broken one.

"No, indeed, honey. Them three old fellers seem about as useless bits of lumber as there is in the tall timber. Yet the Lord, He lets 'em live for some purpose of His own. That's what I say. We can't question the Lord's mysteries. If it was best for you to know who your folks were——"

"I think we shall probably see the Uncles-all before long," interrupted Gypsy.

"No?"

"Yes, I saw Bobolink running through the grove and down into the valley more than an hour ago. John must have sent him from up the river. His second drive is on, and I guess John needs all the help he can get to work the logs through the white water to-morrow. The Uncles-all will come by here, like enough."

"True word!" ejaculated Aunt Tabby, bustling up from her seat. "And me with a kitchen apern on."

She was still as light on her feet as a much younger woman. Gypsy smiled after her as she hurried into the house. When she returned she wore a stiffly starched gingham dress with a bit

of lace at neck and wrists, and wore her gold-bowed spectacles instead of her ordinary steel-bowed glasses.

"Them men is a nuisance," she sighed, dropping into the creaking chair again, "but I don't propose to have 'em ketch me without a clean gownd on after the house is rid up in the afternoon."

"Just in time, Aunty," murmured Gypsy, hearing voices on the other side of the house.

Eben Stetter's words, asthmatic though his voice was, reached the ears of the two women on the front porch first of all.

"I tell you it was last week on a Friday that we went over to help John on that other drive. What's the matter with you, Neb Crane? You're the beat-  
enes'——"

"Your head's full of corn-mush, Eben," croaked Crane harshly. "'Tain't brains the Lord give you —'tis a second stummick, an' He put corn-mush into it. It was Wednesday Bobolink come for us before."

"Nothing of the kind! 'Twas Friday. Wasn't it, Sam?"

"I'll leave it to Sam Killock if 'twasn't Wednesday."

"You're both wrong—as usual," declared the cockatoo-man, with absolute confidence. "'Twas on Thursday John sent for us. How-do, Miss Tabby? How-do, Gypsy?"

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"Why, Sam, you're crazy!" squealed Stetter in denial.

"Hi! Yi! You know it all, of course," croaked Neb Crane.

"Now, look here, you men," broke in Aunt Tabby's penetrating voice. "I hope you remember where you are. You are at Paradise, an' we don't 'low no argument here."

"No, ma'am, that's what I tell 'em," Sam Killock said, puffing out his chest. "They'd quarrel with Peter at the Golden Gate, them two would."

"And you'd egg 'em on!" snapped Aunt Tabby. "One's as bad as the other—an' you all three old enough to be thinkin' of your latter end!"

"Well, Miss Tabithy, we ain't so dreadful old," wheezed Stetter. "There's been older fellers than us before—an' their friends didn't take 'em out an' knock 'em in the head to put 'em out o' their misery."

"Yes. I know. There was Methuselah," agreed Aunt Tabby, still scornful. "He was some older; but I bet he wasn't no more of a nuisance."

"That's a harsh sayin'—a harsh sayin', Miss Tabby," Neb Crane observed, solemnly wagging his head.

"You can take hope of one thing, Miss Murdock," said Stetter, sighing. "Won't none of us live to celebrate our six hundred an' sixty-ninth birthday, like he did."

"Like who did?" snapped Neb Crane suddenly.

"Methuselah. I wish't you'd dig your ears out, Neb," said Mr. Stetter.

"What's that?" returned Crane. "Six hundred and sixty-nine? Why Methuselah was nine hundred an' ninety-six when he died."

"Nine hundred!" gasped Stetter. "You know better! Nothin' like it. Methuselah——"

"Now you men stop that!" exclaimed Aunt Tabby. "I won't listen to you argue—least of all over sacred matters."

"Well, now, Miss Murdock!" sputtered Crane, "we want to get things right, don't we? 'Specially about religion. It is plumb irreverent of that dumb-head to say Methuselah only lived to be six hundred and sixty-nine, when anybody with an ounce of brains knows he was nine hundred and ninety-six."

"He wasn't either!" wheezed Stetter.

"He was, too!" flared Crane. "I leave it to Sam."

"So'll I leave it to Sam," whistled the asthmatic one. "Sam, ain't I right? Wasn't Methuselah six hundred sixty-nine when he up and died?"

"Wasn't he nine hundred ninety-six, Sam?" cried Crane vociferously.

"There you both go," scornfully adjudged Killock, turning to the flushed Aunt Tabby and nodding. "Just as I tell you, ma'am, they are always wrong. Methuselah was nine hundred and sixty-

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nine years old when he died and slept with his fathers. It would seem as though them two fellers might get something right sometime; but I don't guess they ever will."

"Humph!" snorted Aunt Tabby. "At that, I'm goin' to look it up in the Bible myself before I take your word for it, Sam Killock. Howsomever, it's a true word that no woman ever lived so long, in Bible times or any other age. Her men-folks would ha' wore her out with their bickerings."

Here Gypsy came out of the house with her hat and laced boots on, and interrupted:

"Are you going over to the river, Uncles-all?"

"Yes. We're going to meet John's drive and help his crew out in the morning," Sam Killock said.

"He's goin' to put in a boom at the point opposite to his cabin, and make the night there," added Neb Crane.

"I am going over with you," said the girl. "I'll be back for supper, Aunty," she flung back over her shoulder.

"Have a care of yourself and don't get your feet wet like you did before," cautioned the old woman more placidly.

The three old timbermen followed the girl down through the maple grove. She kept them chuckling and answering her quips so that they forgot to quarrel. There was still plenty of light on the river as well as in the sky when they reached the bank.

Before obtaining a view of any part of the stream they heard the explosive sounds of colliding logs above the roar of the water. The river was running higher even than the week before, when Longfoot had got his first drive to the Tall Timber mills.

The yellow-black water, frothing like a boiling cauldron, was speckled with the black logs as far as the eye could reach. The logs tore down the current, here and there spinning in a whirlpool, anon leaping half their lengths into the air and crashing upon each other and upon the boulders in the channel as they fell back as though endowed with life.

A few of the rivermen were strolling along the bank on either side of Brindle River, watching for incipient jams or for grounded logs. Most of the crew were ahead, however, working at the temporary boom.

Gypsy kept on with the three old fellows toward the point opposite John Longfoot's cabin. She had not seen Longfoot since the day of her adventure in the stream and her visit to his home. But Bobolink, the Indian lad, had told Gypsy that "the boss" was all right and "sent his regards."

An hour after leaving the lodge on Paradise Knoll they came to the place where the river was jammed full of logs from shore to shore. Several huge timbers, chained together, stretched from this side and anchored near the west shore, formed the boom. Behind this the fruit of the crew's labors at a place twenty miles north was herded in a

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plunging raft of logs, about and over which the water foamed.

The men ran about on these logs as though they made a perfectly safe flooring, instead of offering as treacherous a foothold as could well be imagined.

Now and then several logs would be heaved up above the general surface, grinding and splintering, threatening to choke and form a jam that would imperil the smooth sailing of the drive when the boom was cut in the morning.

To these incipient jams the men would dart and, with their peaveys, straighten out the tangle, oftentimes splashed from head to foot and always in peril of slipping between the plunging timbers and there being crushed.

Bobolink was as heedless at this work as he could be. Gypsy saw John Longfoot on the opposite bank gesticulating to the Indian boy in warning; but the lad the next moment leaped in ahead of older and more experienced men in attacking a bunch of choked timbers.

A more careful riverman would have seen that these logs were only temporarily jammed. But Bobolink thrust at what appeared to be the key log with all his might.

The next moment the writhing logs slid apart, separating widely, and Bobolink was dragged from his footing and disappeared into the foaming water.

Longfoot was not the man nearest the scene of the accident, but he was the first to cross the heaving raft of logs and reach its up-river edge where Bobolink had disappeared.

"Have a care, John!" shrieked Sam Killock, who stood directly behind Gypsy. "That fool Injun ain't worth your losin' a leg!"

Nobody but Longfoot was near enough to attempt to seize the boy when he rose to the surface after his plunge into the river. Stretching one arm out for him, John saw a huge log, sailing butt on, charging down upon them.

One of three things must happen within the next few seconds: Bobolink must go down again and be swept to death under the logs; or he would be struck and killed by the butt of the charging timber; or John Longfoot must exert phenomenal muscular power to drag the boy out upon the heaving surface of the raft.



## CHAPTER X

### THE SPIRIT OF THE WATERS

THE girl on the overhanging riverbank was held spellbound by the tragic threat of this incident. John Longfoot was not at the instant in danger; but it seemed that the Indian lad in the water could not be saved.

The charging timber, coming butt on downstream and the milling logs all about the place of the accident made a situation fraught with singular peril. The older rivermen in sight of the spot yelled for John to let the boy go and escape from the charging log himself.

But Longfoot took a chance for Bobolink that perhaps nobody else would have taken. Somehow, Bobolink's fate touched John Longfoot nearly. There was a tribal feeling between them. In some distant way they were akin.

The man's strong fingers hooked into the collar of the boy's shirt as Bobolink was swept under the raft. Longfoot leaped to his feet at the same instant, and this action literally snatched the Indian lad out of the river.

The slight, dripping figure of the boy flew over

Longfoot's head to drop, sprawling, on more tightly wedged logs behind. But the outermost log on which Longfoot's feet were placed rolled under his calks.

It rolled toward the charging timber, and the man lost his footing. The butt of the log, ramming the raft like a battering ram, knocked the timberman flat on his back.

The timber's butt heaved itself on to the raft, and its weight, grinding down upon the smaller logs, caught and held John Longfoot by one leg.

The shout that rose from the horrified members of the logging crew spurred Gypsy out of her seeming trance. John Longfoot was down, and for a long moment they all thought 'he log was grinding him to pulp. The girl leaped from the high bank to a ledge that here thrust itself into the angry stream. Beyond the ledge was the heaving surface of the log jam. She would have ventured out upon the logs had not Neb Crane, forgetting his rheumatic knee, scrambled over to her and seized her arm.

"Girl!" he bawled in her ear, "ain't you got a speck of sense? You can't help. You'd only hinder."

It took young and supple men to ride those timbers. Pierre, the Canadian, and Jansen, starting from opposite sides of the river, ran to Longfoot's aid, spurning the chips from their calks as they leaped from log to log. They gave the prostrate

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Indian boy no heed for the moment, but hurried straight to where the timber boss lay.

The shrieking log, showering the rescuers with bits of bark flayed from its husk, was driven slantingly into the air by the pressure behind. Fortunately this pressure raised the log's weight from Longfoot's body, but not before it had mangled the man's left leg above the knee most painfully.

The two rescuers seized him, and before the big timber could fall again, they had dragged Longfoot out of its way. But he could not walk. They bore him between them to the farther shore and to the foot of the path leading up to his cabin.

Somebody picked up Bobolink; but that youth, aside from a bruised face and a lost peavey, was little the worse for his adventure.

"I'm going over there! I'm going over there, Uncle Neb!" declared Gypsy, over and over, struggling with the old timberman.

"Hi! Yi!" ejaculated Crane. "Sam, you take hold on this crazy girl. She must not risk her life on that there jam."

"Of course she mustn't," wheezed Stetter, for once in agreement with his dear enemy.

But Sam was against them as usual.

"John will want her over there—of course he will! I'm going over myself. Here, you, Steve M'Graw! Take Gypsy across them logs. She ain't a mite of weight."

The big timberman who acted as Longfoot's fore-

man, and who had hastened downstream at the first alarm, seized the girl and sprang out upon the logs. He ran across the river with her, as agile as a deer. Three of the crew had raised the helpless Longfoot again. His face was blood-streaked and pallid. His injured leg was a disorder of torn clothing and flesh.

"We've got to have Doc Hewitt just as quick as he can get here," Smedley excitedly declared. "Mebbe the leg's broke."

"It must be smashed all to pieces," said Jansen.

"Oh!" gasped Gypsy in horror.

"Shut up, you!" growled Steve, angrily, to the thoughtless men. "It ain't as bad as that, I vow. But we'd better have the doc."

"Ain't a horse for five mile," Smedley declared.

"We don't need a horse," Gypsy said quickly, recovering her self-possession. "There's John's canoe yonder, covered up in that brush heap. You set it afloat and I'll go to Tall Timber Junction for Doctor Hewitt."

"No, no, Miss Gypsy. You can't do that," said Steve. "One of us men'll have to go."

"I can handle a canoe as good as any one of you—better than most," declared the girl. "And you are all needed here to hold these logs and tend to John."

"But the white water down there!" objected the foreman.

"I've seen the rapids of Brindle River before, I

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hope—and been through 'em, too," cried the girl. "Come on! Lift in that canoe. It's twelve miles to the Junction and it'll take Doctor Hewitt three hours to ride up here. We don't know how bad John's leg may be hurt."

The others had carried the injured man up the gulch to his cabin. Sam Killock came staggering across the logs and leaped ashore with the aid of his peavey.

"What are you goin' to do?" he demanded.

"Help Steve lift in that canoe," commanded Gypsy. "I'm going to the Junction in it and nobody shall stop me!"

Sam threw up his hands. "In course! In course! If she says so, she's bound to do it, Steve. You don't know that girl like we do. She was the stubbornest thing in pinafores that ever walked on two laigs! Let her go."

Gypsy smiled up at Killock; but her eyes were awash with tears.

"You go up and see how badly John is hurt, Uncle Sam," she begged. "I'll get the doctor here just as soon as possible."

"Don't you worry none about Johnny. We'll take care of him till Doc. Hewitt comes. I ain't a half bad sawbones myself."

"Don't you undertake to saw any bones till the doctor comes," she warned him, and stepped into the canoe.

The state of Longfoot's leg alarmed her beyond expression. Suppose he should lose his limb? It would be awful—disastrous! As a timberman, his career would be utterly ruined. What would John Longfoot do in the world if he could no longer be a boss in the tall timber?

The paddle was hung in becketts at her hand. She seized it and looked up to see Bobolink holding his bruised face and staring down at her from the shore.

"Your face isn't hurt so bad that you can't use your legs, Bobolink," Gypsy cried. "Run up to Paradise and tell Aunt Tabby I have gone to the Junction and I'll likely stay all night with Mrs. Guffey at the hotel. I'll be back sometime tomorrow."

She then thrust in the paddle and drove the canoe out into the current. The temporary boom holding back the great drive of logs made a backwater just below it; but a few yards down stream the current was quite typical of Brindle River at full flood.

Her experience the week before had been merely an escapade; but this venture was in deadly earnest. On her previous disastrous canoe trip she had had no intention of venturing into the white water below the spot where Longfoot's first drive had been launched. She had no wish now, however, to make portage around that half mile of rapids. It would take too long to do that, for the doctor must be

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started for Longfoot's cabin just as soon as possible.

Although the sun was now some time below the forest-crowned heights west of Brindle River, there would still be twilight on the stream for a couple of hours. If all went well Gypsy would make the run to Tall Timber Junction in much less than half that time.

Working feverishly with her paddle, she kept her gaze upon what lay ahead of her, rather than upon the banks. She skillfully avoided a dozen snags and boulders within the first half minute. Whirled along in the grasp of the powerful current, Gypsy was still mistress of the craft and took advantage of even the threatening eddies and whirlpools which dimpled the stream.

Once she was caught in a "throwback," where the black water foamed to yellow suds and spluttered the rocks all about. Her canoe was whirled about and shot up stream again under the bank with a velocity that almost took her breath.

But in twenty seconds she had forced the craft into the main stream once more, where it darted on with the current and with greater speed.

The fact that John Longfoot's boom held back much drift stuff was an aid to Gypsy's safer passage. Had the flood been at its height the timberman would not have dammed the river as far as he did; as soon as all his logs were herded behind the boom, the men would open a wider gate next to the west

shore and more of the light culch would thus be set free. She was well out of the peril of this, however; yet there were obstructions for the girl to evade.

Her keen gaze and equally keen attention were both engaged to the full for the next few minutes. She had then swung past the sand spit where she had formerly come to grief and was rescued by Longfoot from the double danger of the flood and the bobcat.

The bobcat had disappeared from the sand bar; for Longfoot, on his journey to Tall Timber Junction after the accident and in the wake of his first log-drive, had carried his rifle and with it had put the marooned and wounded animal out of its pain.

Shortly below this spot the rapids began. The entire surface of the stream from bank to bank was white with foam. The water fairly boiled. Spray in places flew a dozen feet into the air and here and there where a bigger boulder thrust its bulk out of the water, the waves dashed about it like surf against a reef.

But like John Longfoot, Gypsy had been used to white water all her life. She remembered having been taken through this piece of rapids at full flood by Si Patterson when she was a very small girl; and since that time she had learned the treacherous channel well. It was only the year before that she had shot the rip alone.

Perhaps, however, at that previous time the



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white water had not been so brawling. Its present threatening aspect might have made even Gypsy Patterson hesitate at another time.

But this was no escapade. The emergency was serious. Nor was there time at this late minute for hesitation. She could feel the acceleration of the stream as the canoe first plunged into the foam-streaked reach.

This half mile of white water was the only real barrier to her journey to Tall Timber Junction. Once through it, and around the elbow below, the sailing of the canoe would be comparatively simple as far as the railroad bridge, for the broads of the river, as the quieter pools just above the Junction were called, were sluggish, even during the time of the spring freshet.

She raised her eyes just once to look at the elbow ahead. Around that turn, on the eastern bank, the figure of a man suddenly appeared.

Gypsy did not know who he was, nor did she vouchsafe him a second glance. She merely realized that he was not a native of the tall timber, for he was dressed very differently from the rivermen.

He was nobody who could or would help her in her self-imposed task of getting the doctor for John Longfoot. Nor could the course of her canoe be retarded in any case now until she was either through the white water or was wrecked therein. To safety or disaster she must go on, pitting her skill against the eccentricities of the current.

The stranger had halted in amazement the moment he sighted the canoe and the girl. The surface of the stream looked to him at this spot to be a huge whirlpool in which any craft—no matter how heavily constructed—must be wrecked. And this light canoe seemed an utterly impossible craft for such an attempt.

Had the girl been carried away by the flood? Was she hopelessly and helplessly in the clutch of the rapids? Could nothing be done to rescue her from what looked to his unaccustomed eye to be certain death?

These questions surged through the man's brain first of all. Then, as the canoe was whirled nearer with uncanny swiftness, yet managed with uncanny skill as well, he forgot everything but wonder and admiration for the girl in it.

Only seconds passed while Gypsy Patterson drove the canoe through that half mile of white water. Her flushed face, her blazing eyes, her supple young body as it weaved from side to side, impressed him as being the most enticing sight he had ever been privileged to see.

"She's a wonder! A goddess! What a girl!" were his unspoken thoughts.

In her freedom of motion and in her daring she was something particularly appealing to this stranger in the tall timber. He had never dreamed that a woman could display such bodily strength and such perfect courage and poise.

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Here was a goddess—a super-woman—who filled his mind with admiration such as he had never before dreamed of feeling for any woman. She was no plaything—no toy—to be caressed and laughed at and laughed with or put aside when he was tired of her!

Here was a woman fit to be a big man's real mate. His heart swelled and his eyes grew luminous as he watched her fight with the flood.

After his first apprehension of disaster the stranger only realized the wonderful picture the girl made in the midst of the white water and the spirit with which she handled the canoe. There were several times during her passage of the rapids when the spray quite hid both her and the canoe for a moment. But he was assured in his heart that she must come through safely. She could not fail!

That girl could do anything she set out to do!

Then she flashed past him, her saturated garments revealing to him every line and curve of her beautiful body. Such mental poise and physical perfection truly placed her on a pedestal above and beyond anything in womankind he ever had imagined.

She was gone, around the elbow in the river, and he asked himself as he turned and stumbled after, if it were possible that he had seen a spirit of the wild waters rather than a flesh-and-blood girl.

## CHAPTER XI

### A KNIGHT RIDES BY

THERE was a landing dock above the high railroad bridge that had not been swept away by either the flood or the log drives which had gone before, and Gypsy went ashore there and lifted out the canoe.

Save that she had stopped once to empty the water out of her canoe below the rapids, she had come down from John Longfoot's cabin without a halt. Her anxiety for the injured man was very real.

There was still some light in the western sky, but in the east the pale stars shone. A spark or two of lamplight appeared in the windows of the sprawling town.

Most of the dwellings were frame houses, boarded with slabs lapped over one another to shed the rain. The new Court House was built of brick, and so was the principal store. But the rest of Tall Timber Junction would burn like tinder if once fire got into it again.

The railroad ran through the main street—Railroad Avenue, it was called—and the principal shops

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and the hotel faced the tracks; while the ugly brown station squatted like a huge beetle in the middle of the town.

Doctor Hewitt's office was only a short distance from the landing, and Gypsy ran all the way to it.

The physician left his own meal to speak with Gypsy. The girl's urgent pleading and the fact that it was John Longfoot who was hurt made Doctor Hewitt promise to saddle his horse immediately and ride up the river to the timberman's cabin.

"But you must not go back the way you are. Why! you are wet to the skin, Gypsy," the physician exclaimed.

"Worse than that," she replied ruefully. "I think I am saturated to the very marrow of my bones."

"You're chilled, child. You'd better come in and get on some dry clothing."

"I'm going to Mrs. Guffey's, and I will stay there all night."

"Take this, then," he said, giving her a remedy to ward off the effects of her exposure. "And drink at least a pint of hot coffee at supper, Gypsy. Get yourself thoroughly warmed through. You live too far away—up there at Paradise—for me to be riding up to treat you for the croup."

He was off then with a laugh, and with his saddlebags, to the barn lot while the girl hastened across the tracks to the Lumberman's Rest. The

hotel was a rambling building with the smell about it of new pine boards. Every piece of furniture in the hotel was painfully new and painfully cheap as well.

She found Mrs. Guffey in the kitchen overseeing the serving of supper. She was a bustling, sturdy, red-faced woman, who was as capable as her husband was shiftless. Marmaduke Guffey had put her money into the Lumberman's Rest and had pretty nearly run the hotel into the ground before his wife insisted upon pensioning him and conducting the caravansary herself.

Now she dressed him well, allowed him just so many drinks a day and all the cheap cigars he could smoke, and he could sit around and play host as he pleased, as long as he did not interfere with the running of the business.

"Duke is one o' them ornamental men," his wife was wont to say proudly. "No use his trying to mess with anything useful. It ain't in him. But he's a good looker and makes a husband for any wife to be proud of."

So she worked like a trace-dog herself while Duke did the honors in the bar, the dining-room, and on the porch. He was a well-fed man and really was a good advertisement for the house. He could not be trusted with the cash; but he always had several silver pieces to rattle against each other in his pocket.

"For the Good Land o' Goshen, Gypsy Patter-

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son!" exclaimed Mrs. Guffey. "Was you swept down by the flood?"

"Just about, Mrs. Guffey. Lend me something dry to put on, do! And I must stay here to-night."

"It ain't possible that the house on Paradise has been swept away, is it?" cried the hotel's mistress. "Why, if that is so, then Tall Timber Junction must be ha'f a mile under water an' I so busy I ain't noticed it!"

She hurried Gypsy to the stairway and up to her own room as she talked. The girl told her briefly of the accident to John Longfoot and how she had come down Brindle River for the doctor.

It was after she had eaten her supper and drunk the hot coffee as the doctor had ordered that Gypsy, about to ascend to the room assigned her for the night, saw a stranger enter the hotel. She was just about to mount the stairs and the man did not vouchsafe her a second glance, for in Mrs. Guffey's voluminous and ugly gingham dress she made no attractive picture.

Gypsy did not for an instant remember the man she had seen on the river bank. But she knew who this individual was. Mrs. Guffey had been full of gossip at the supper table.

The girl favored the man's back with a long look as he strode into the bar. He was dressed in what appeared to be the amateur sportsman's idea of proper dress for the woods. His figure bulked

big; and to Gypsy's critical gaze he seemed too fleshy.

She remembered H. Harvey Stafford as a strippling youth, and thought that his figure had not changed for the better. She preferred the lean, wiry type of man, who trod with a springiness that this city man did not possess. And yet, Stafford had seemed a most wonderful creature in her eyes during his visit of some years before.

"You don't have to tell all you know, Gypsy," Mrs. Guffey had whispered. "He told me he didn't come out here on business, so he'd just as lief it wasn't generally known that he was here. He's come for fishin' and huntin'—'general relaxation,' he calls it. Needs a rest.

"Does seem like them city men work themselves near to a frazzle when they do work. Mr. Stafford looks hearty enough; but I expect it's his brain that's done wore out. This figurin' how to put salt on the tail of every loose dollar is some wearin'—I know it myself."

"He isn't married, is he, Mrs. Guffey?" Gypsy asked with more interest than she intended to reveal to the gossipy woman.

"No. I got that much out of him," the woman said, nodding vigorously. "He says he ain't the marryin' kind. But you know how it is. All men talk that way till the right woman gets hold of 'em."



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Although Mrs. Guffey's philosophy only made Gypsy laugh, she confessed to much curiosity regarding H. Harvey Stafford. It did not cross her mind that John Longfoot's journey to New York had brought the president of the American Consolidated Timber Corporation out here to Tall Timber. She did not connect the two facts at all.

The youth, Stafford, had been a memory to her all through her girlhood. There had been a halo of romance about the rich man's son. His air and his carriage, as well as his speech and the very clothes he wore, were so different from that of the local youth that Gypsy as a little girl considered H. Harvey Stafford a most wonderful person indeed.

He represented to her imaginative mind all the education and culture the outside world held for those who dwelt therein. And even when she herself gained greater knowledge of these things at school, her memory of Stafford was haloed with a sort of legendary glory.

Her more mature taste would perhaps find much lacking in Stafford now; yet she hoped to meet him while he was here in Tall Timber, and so satisfy her curiosity as to how he had grown—what sort of man he had become in the twelve years since she had last seen him.

The next morning, however, Gypsy was up and away from the hotel before any other guest was astir. Her mind was troubled regarding John

Longfoot, and she went first of all to Doctor Hewitt's office.

When she inquired at his door of the state of the timberman's injury, the sleepy voice of the physician assured her that Longfoot would come out all right.

"Some bruised and torn, but no bone broken," Doctor Hewitt said. "He'll have to stick in bed for a week or more and keep quiet for a spell thereafter. He was talking last night about getting up to-day to see that drive through to the mill. But I told that Bobolink," concluded the rough-and-ready surgeon, "to run away with John's pants if he tried to get up. I'll be up to see him again, come to-morrow."

Gypsy was not at all satisfied that Longfoot would get all the attention he should have. She knew even the "Uncles-all" and Bobolink must follow the drive. The river was several inches lower this morning than it had been the day before, and it behooved John Longfoot's crew to hurry the logs down to the mill before slack water caught them.

Fifteen miles by tote road to Paradise Knoll did not daunt Gypsy; but she felt a desire to make sure John was comfortable before going home. To try to breast the stream with the canoe—especially in the face of the log-drive—would have been ridiculous.

So she left Longfoot's canoe in the care of a

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riverman and set out to walk to John's cabin by the road Doctor Hewitt had followed the night before. This path was west of Brindle River, running through a stretch of cut-over land and passing within a couple of miles of Longfoot's abode. From it a bridlepath led to the timberman's cabin.

She was out of sight of the river almost as soon as she had crossed it; but the road was never far from the stream. It led at first through several defiles and between steep hills which now, denuded of the bigger timber, were scarcely more beautiful than the bald heads of human beings.

Gypsy felt no ill-effects from the adventure of the previous evening. She walked with that spring and suppleness that her outdoor life had stored within her. Physically she was as perfect as health itself.

Two hours after leaving the Junction she was more than half way to her destination. The sun was high and its beams were warm. The dust of the road parched the girl's throat. She already looked eagerly for a certain spring at which she had more than once slaked her thirst when she had come over this route before.

At length she spied it—high up on the face of the bluff overhanging the road. A little rill ran down and into the ditch beside the road; but its bed lay in the sun and the water was warm and muddy. The spring itself bubbled out of the hillside clear

and cold she well knew. She clambered up to it without much difficulty.

The last step was a breast-high boulder which, even as she swarmed upon it, rocked in its pocket. The late rains had washed about this rock, and, light as Gypsy was, it seemed that her weight was all-sufficient to turn the rock's balance.

It quivered, tipped outward, and as the girl sprang with a startled cry to the very lip of the pool into which the spring bubbled, the boulder tore out of the gravelly soil, heaved itself over, and slid amid an avalanche of small rubbish to the foot of the bluff. In its descent the landslide completely wiped out the path by which Gypsy had reached the spring. There was not a foothold within her reach; she was marooned upon the face of the bluff, twenty feet above the road.

As the roar of the avalanche died away the startled girl heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs upon the hard path over which she had so recently traveled. In a moment the horse and its rider came into view from around a turn in the road.

She clung to the out-thrust root of a tree above the mass of the avalanche which had filled the ditch. The stream trickled down the raw, red hill-side in a muddy rill. There really was not a shelf, or any other projection, upon which the girl might step.

"Trapped!" exclaimed the rider, and smiled up

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at her as he held in his spirited mount at the foot of the bluff.

She knew him to be the very man thought of whom had so filled her mind since the supper-table gossip of Mrs. Guffey the evening before. Stafford, on his part, recognized the wonderful girl he had seen shooting the rapids of Brindle River.

"You must be always doing stunts like a moving picture actress," he said. "I saw you canoeing last evening, and I must say you managed to escape what I thought seemed sure disaster. Have you planned your escape as well from this predicament?"

"No, sir. This was quite involuntary," she told him, rather harassed.

Gradually the surprise faded from his countenance. An expression that Gypsy, curious as she was about him, could not fathom, irradiated his face. His smile was quite engaging as he forced his prancing horse close in toward the bluff, down which the loose earth and gravel was still rattling.

"You must accept my aid," he said earnestly. "That whole thing may give way. It looks ready for a complete landslide into the road. Jump!"

He held out both arms to catch her, sitting his saddle as firmly as though he had grown there. The flushed and excited girl looked down into his face with growing confidence. To his mind she seemed a veritable little fairy—a sprite! What a prize she

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was, this winsome elfin daughter of the woods!

"Come!" he urged again. "Have no fear. I will catch you."

Yet he realized that it was not fear which made her hesitate. She merely set herself for the leap and chose the moment when his horse was more quiet.

When she sprang out from the face of the bluff, she seemed wafted like a leaf into his arms. Her weight was as nothing; but he held her close for a long moment, enjoying to the full the pressure of her lithe and sweetly molded body against his breast.

Her dark, piquant face laughed up at him. She lay in his arms for a space, getting her breath. Then she slipped out of his grasp with a motion as sinuous as that of a snake, leaving his arms feeling more empty when she was gone, it seemed, than they had ever been before.

"Thank you, Mr. Stafford!" she said, with a roguish little laugh. "I hope you will ride by again when I get into trouble."

## CHAPTER XII

### NEW INTERESTS

"You seem to have much the advantage of me, young lady," Stafford said, with that cultivated smile of his which Gypsy noted softened all the hard lines in his countenance and made his expression really winning. "You appear to know my name, while I haven't the first idea what yours is."

"I think the advantage is the other way around," the girl rejoined, demurely. "You spoke of having seen me shoot Brindle Rapids last evening, and I am sure I do not recall seeing you on the river bank."

"You were much too earnestly engaged at the time, I fancy. Really," he said, with admiration in his voice, "you got that canoe through the white water in a most remarkable manner."

"It only looked so to you—a stranger."

"Yet I do not seem to be a stranger," he retorted. "You seem to know my name well enough."

"Surely. Everybody should know you around here. You do not expect to hide your light under a bushel, Mr. Stafford? You, being the head of

the company that owns most of this timber, everybody will recognize you."

"All very well," he interrupted, looking down at her from his saddle with a suspicion that she was laughing at him. "But I have not been at Tall Timber in person for—well, not since I was a boy."

"I have a good memory," Gypsy told him.

"You must have. You could only have been a tiny girl when I was here last."

"I was about eight years old," she announced.

"Indeed? Quite a grown-up person, I presume."

"I thought I was," she confessed, laughing with him.

"Had I dreamed I had left a lady here so much interested in me, I would have returned before."

She laughed again—he liked to hear the silver chime of it—but this time with some scorn.

"You take too much for granted, Mr. Stafford," she told him, ready now to put a stop to this sort of talk. "Mrs. Guffey, at the hotel, told me who you were last evening. Then I remembered having seen you once when I was a little girl."

"Oh!" His countenance actually fell. He really had been pleased at the thought of this winsome sprite of the woods and waters remembering him from that long past time when he had hunted and fished and loafed about Tall Timber.

"You have punctured my vanity," he admitted ruefully.



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"Perhaps that is good for you. We are plain people here in Tall Timber. We do not put on vanity ourselves save with our 'Sunday best.' Now, you——"

She swept his highly ornamental riding habit with a glance that could not be mistaken. He was, however, proof against the arrow of her criticism. She had not found his Achilles tendon.

"Have pity!" he exclaimed. "Remember that when we city people hike out for the big woods we are at the mercy of our tailor and haberdasher, neither of whom was ever nearer to Tall Timber than Hoboken."

"I guess I know what you mean," she agreed lightly. "And you are not as badly dressed as some I have seen venture into the woods without much protection from the rabbits and squirrels."

"Oh—now——"

"Hear that jay? Or, is it a whisky-jack? He is laughing at you."

"Perhaps the bird is laughing at you for climbing up to that spring and having to be helped down."

She threw back her head at that and laughed heartily. He watched the play of her throat and the rise and fall of her bosom with an appreciation that he had never felt before in looking at a beautiful woman. He did not wish to close this interview with the girl of the woods so abruptly.

"Surely you do not live near here, Miss——?" he asked, lingeringly, hoping she would give him her name.

"No. I am walking northward. And I must be on my way."

"But I am riding that way, too. Let me set you up here in my saddle and I will walk."

"Could not think of it!" Gypsy told him with a toss of her head. "I must be gone, too. I have an object in view."

"So have I," he declared, descending from the horse, the new saddle creaking as he did so. "My object is to become better acquainted," he added, getting into step with her, the bridle-lines looped over his arm. "You have not yet told me your name, and it is not fair for you to hold all the advantage."

"Shucks!" she laughed. "I'm Gypsy Patterson, Mr. Stafford. Does that information do you any good?"

Whether it did or did not, he had such control of his features that she saw nothing in his expression to alarm or puzzle her. He murmured:

"I am happy to know you, Miss Patterson. We are on a better footing at once. At least, we know each other's names."

But in secret the name of "Gypsy Patterson" drummed an accompaniment to certain swift and ugly thoughts in his mind. Gypsy Patterson! Si

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Patterson's adopted daughter. The girl that half-breed Indian had mentioned. And if John Longfoot had journeyed to New York to interview H. Harvey Stafford on behalf of this girl, there must be something between them. The blasé city man at once put the most evil construction possible upon this fact.

A certain change came over Stafford's manner. Even his facial expression was different as he looked down at the girl.

Gypsy having already searched him with her eyes, and, having adjudged him at his best, did not favor him thereafter with many direct glances. She did not see the sudden change in the man. It was not to be apprehended in his voice.

They talked companionably enough, walking briskly along the rough road. Several times Stafford dropped a phrase that caused the girl to flash him a startled look. But he always saw the start and knew the sharp glance was coming, and his face was always a polite mask.

Oh, H. Harvey Stafford thought he knew her type. And he was a patient stalker.

There grew, however, a certain shyness in Gypsy's manner as they walked on. Was it doubt? Was it self-consciousness?

She knew, at least, that Stafford was skillfully probing to discover how deep down the foundations of her general education lay. He spoke of

things and used turns of speech that the ordinary forest-bred girl could not have appreciated or understood. She refused to give him the satisfactory explanation of her education which she knew he craved. His interest in her private concerns was very marked and—to tell the truth—this pleased Gypsy.

And why should it not? For years she had been building up about the memory of the boy Stafford a wonderful figure of educated and sophisticated manhood. This imaginary figure even now filled her vision rather than the real man. Nor did Stafford seem very different from what she expected him to be.

He was actually the only young and personable man of the educated type Gypsy Patterson had ever seen.

It was not that she compared Stafford with John Longfoot, for instance, or with the other woodsmen she knew. They were all distinctly of another world from this man of city ways and manners.

Nor had she any foolish ideas regarding the influence she might exert over this visitor to Tall Timber. Gypsy felt too strongly her shortcomings and inexperience as compared with the ways of more worldly-wise girls. Yet she was pleased to be able to pique Harvey Stafford's interest and hold it for even this brief time.

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She did not allow Stafford to accompany her to John Longfoot's cabin. Nor did she mention the timberman's name nor explain to Stafford her errand in this direction.

She did tell him where she lived on the other side of the river, and how he could the more easily reach Paradise, either on foot or on horseback, from Tall Timber Junction.

But she separated from him at a point on the road where Stafford's unaccustomed eye could see no trail through the forest at all.

"This looks like a wild place to me," he objected, when she determined to part from him. "I do not see the first sign of a path, Miss Gypsy."

"That is because your eyes are not open to wood signs and forest lore," she returned, laughing.

"I am a good pupil. You must teach me," he suggested.

"What? You would attempt to learn in a brief vacation what we backwoods-folk learn only in a lifetime?"

"One can make a beginning," he replied stoutly. "These woods entice me. I am charmed. I certainly believe I was bemused last evening when I saw you in that canoe shooting the rapids."

"Oh, *that!* You think it wonderful to see a girl do that, just as you would watch a woman on a flying trapeze at the circus. You do not puff me up with pride by such praise, Mr. Stafford."

"No? That is because you do not realize how much you have that ordinary girls have not," he rejoined drily.

She shook her head obstinately. "I am not proud of such accomplishments," she repeated and stepped out of the path into the underbrush.

So quick and so silent was she that almost at once she was gone from his sight, nor could he hear her step. He mounted his horse after a bit and rode on.

When he was well out of hearing the girl of the tall timber reappeared in the road and followed quickly upon his trail. Stafford rode past the opening of the bridle-path heading toward John Longfoot's cabin without even seeing it. Gypsy entered this track, and in half an hour came to the timberman's shack.

The boom had been cut and the last log of the drive had passed on. She heard the distant shouts of the tailmen, who were sacking the rear of the drive. She knew Longfoot must be alone.

She raised the latch and peered into the room. The big chair was arranged for him close to the hearth, with a pile of firewood at his left hand and the table drawn close to his right with books, his fiddle, and a jug of water upon it.

"John!"

For a moment he neither moved nor greeted her. He had been lying back in the chair, his injured leg

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resting stiffly on another, his gaze fixed upon the sputtering flames. Perhaps he thought that he merely dreamed he heard her voice.

"John!"

"Gypsy!"

"May I come in, John?"

"The doc's got me laid on the shelf for fair. I gave him my word I wouldn't move without help. I guess I can't stop your coming in, Gypsy."

"The boys should have put your rifle handy," she laughed. "Something might get in here and bite you while you are defenseless."

"That was an oversight, I guess. You'd better hand me down the gun, Gypsy."

"How does the leg feel, John?" she asked him more seriously.

"Just as though I had a shovelful of hot embers on it."

"That's too bad! Have you had breakfast, John?"

"Oh, Uncle Neb saw to that. And Bobolink was in an hour ago. But I want they should put that drive through to-day."

"I'll rid up the place and get our dinner," she said briskly.

"That's good of you, Gypsy."

"I know it is," she rejoined with mild sarcasm.

"Two words for myself and one for you. I am

already sharp-set after walking up here from the Junction."

"It was mighty good of you to run the rapids last night and get Doc Hewitt up here so quick."

"That's all right!"

"And brave of you, too. There isn't another girl in Tall Timber could do it."

"Now, don't be foolish, John. It was nothing."

"Mighty big nothing," he said, following her every movement with admiring eyes, as she brisked about the room.

She dusted and set things to rights, giving a deft woman's touch to everything; and then set about getting dinner. At the same time she talked, retailing the gossip she had gathered from Mrs. Guffey at the hotel.

She told him of all she had heard from that good woman's storehouse of information—all but one thing. She did not mention H. Harvey Stafford or his presence in Tall Timber. For some reason she shrank from that.



## CHAPTER XIII

### A MATTER OF EDUCATION

STAFFORD had set out to ride to John Longfoot's cabin after making certain cautious inquiries at Tall Timber Junction. He did not find the timberman's place of abode and, after his meeting with Gypsy Patterson, he did not wish to do so. With all his determination regarding the Patterson claims changed during his brief talk with the girl, he had no desire to question the man whom he thought of contemptuously as "that half-breed."

In fact, the president of the American Consolidated Timber Corporation suddenly wished to approach the Patterson matter from an entirely different angle. Before meeting Gypsy he had not given a moment's consideration as to who or what Si Patterson's adopted daughter might be. The affair to his mind had been merely a business proposition in which he expected to get the better of these folk of the tall timber. No "human interest" side of the problem had entered his thought.

But whatever had been the impression Gypsy made upon his not too sensitive mind, it was a fact that Stafford now tranquilly contemplated paying

for what he was determined to obtain. He was altogether too sophisticated to expect to "get something for nothing." That one must pay the fiddler if one would dance was a confirmed tenet of his belief.

The charm of Gypsy's first appearance had intrigued him. For the time being he had contemplated her altogether from the better side of his nature. He had never lost his original belief in the existence of good women.

But when he learned the girl's name and who she was and remembered his opinion of the timberman who had come to New York to discuss her personal affairs with him, H. Harvey Stafford's mind was utterly cleared of those better and cleaner thoughts which had been inspired by the revelation of Gypsy Patterson's beauty.

She was only a girl of the lumber camps, after all. He remembered having seen several such creatures and having heard gossip about them when he was a young man loafing away a vacation here in the tall timber.

She had lived all her life among rough men and under circumstances that would naturally coarsen her mind and encourage a freedom of action and license of thought that would fill the soul of a decently bred city girl with abhorrence.

He was still somewhat puzzled by her pose of refinement and her seeming knowledge of things

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he thought beyond her ken. But that this was a pose on Gypsy's part, Stafford was still quite confident when he had separated from her in the wood road.

No girl, he determined, could live a rough, wild life among rude timbermen as she had without being contaminated with the vices he believed all such backwoodsmen possessed. He expected to find in the tall timber no more virtue than he did refinement.

If John Longfoot had taken up her cause and was trying to get something out of Si Patterson's estate for Gypsy, of course he was doing it for a purpose. It was in Harvey Stafford's power to do much more for the girl than Longfoot could, and at small cost to the American Consolidated Timber Corporation. In a way, too, which would possibly in the end save his corporation much expense.

He would be killing two birds with one stone. He would play the part of the generous and powerful friend, gaining Gypsy's gratitude for present and future comforts thereby. And if he could not meanwhile gain a personal influence over the girl stronger than any rough lumberman like Longfoot could exert, then that would be his own fault and short-coming!

Duke Guffey, like his wife, was a running font of local information. One did not have to turn

the tap. Words spouted from Duke in a steady stream, even while he ate or smoked.

The gift of a "city" cigar steered the voluble man into just the track H. Harvey Stafford desired. He learned within a very short time all he did not already know about Si Patterson's death, his executors, the three old "pards" in the Break-away, and Bob Larrabee, the lawyer the old timbermen had hired to help them straighten out Gypsy's property.

It was Larrabee the president of the A.C.T.C. wished to know first of all. He learned the lawyer was poor, counted to be "smart," eager to get money, and perhaps not too particular how he got it. At least, this seemed to be the opinion of Duke Guffey.

Stafford looked up Larrabee with a small matter which the A.C.T.C. wished attended to, as an excuse. Larrabee was so pleased to think that the great timber corporation wished his services that "he wagged his tail, sat up and begged, and would have jumped through a hoop had it been held up for him," Stafford told himself.

"So he's all right," thought the president of the corporation. "Now, I believe, I could accomplish all that I wish to without going outside of this god-forsaken hole. But it will do no harm to see these three old codgers they tell about. I'll ride up into Breakaway Valley and look them over."

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It was really Gypsy Patterson he desired to see; but at this stage in the game Stafford would not admit even to himself his overpowering interest in the woods girl.

It was true that there was something more than prettiness and ingenuousness about Gypsy Patterson that attracted Stafford. Something held his interest in a greater degree than had any of his fancies since boyhood. It was not altogether her freshness of mind and spirit or her physical grace; something deeper down in the girl's nature appealed to him more strongly, even, than Grace Lemoyne appealed to him—but in a different way.

This attraction drew him toward Paradise two days after he had aided the forest girl on the road to John Longfoot's cabin. He rode up the pine-tag carpeted tote road through Breakaway Valley, coming at mid-forenoon to the clearing and the three-doored house in which he had been told the one-time partners of Si Patterson lived.

It was a perfectly still day on which Stafford approached the odd cabin. Aside from the soft thud of his horse's hoofs upon the pine tags all the sounds he had heard during his journey through the forest had been those of birds and insects.

The drone of the latter was a rising harmony of elfin voices that the city man did not at all appreciate. Every humming insect, to his mind, either stung or bit.

As for the birds, they would be too busy until even-song with food gathering and nest-building to more than chirp to him. Save the crows! They followed him through the wood and cawed warning of his approach to all ahead. For crows never are too busy to pay more heed to other people's business than to their own.

Stafford came so quietly to the fenced enclosure belonging to the three old men that they did not at first see him. Besides, they were so deeply engaged in one of their never-ending arguments that they would scarcely have noted at the moment a full military invasion.

The visitor saw the trio of old fellows with shrewd eyes. Had H. Harvey Stafford not been generally a good judge of human nature he never would have won his present business success. Nor did he overlook details—those details of character and environment essential to the understanding of most things of importance in this world.

The sketch Duke Guffey, for instance, had given him of the three old timbermen who "lived together so they could enjoy fighting like cats and dogs" had prepared Stafford in a measure for this present scene. But unknown to the trio of excited friendly enemies Stafford studied them in particular while he waited for an opening to introduce himself.

Neb Crane was hobbling up and down on his cane before Stetter's woodpile. The asthmatic man was

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seated upon his chopping block, red-faced and puffing. Sam Killock, scornful of mien and with his topknot bristling, leaned forward in his armchair with full attention fixed upon the argument and the arguers.

"What d'you mean—talkin' to me like that, jest as though I didn't have no eddication?" the rheumatic sufferer was demanding, evidently boiling with exasperation. "One'd think you had a tex'-book for a head and that you invented the rule o' three as well as the multiplication table.

"Why, you ornery, fat-faced freak, you never did know nothin', and you won't never learn nothin', and you ain't likely to get a mite of eddication before Kingdom Come!"

"Huh!" wheezed Stetter, his eyes popping, "I'd like to know who told you so much?"

"'Twasn't you!" snapped Crane, whose repartee was crude but eminently effective.

"I might ha' told you something," Stetter declared, "if I'd had a mind to."

"'Mind'!" snorted Crane. "Hi! Yi! You ain't got no mind. Or if you have, it ain't developed none yet, like a pollywog's hind legs."

"Now, that's enough o' that!" whistled Stetter. "I was brought up as good as you was, Neb Crane, and I had more schoolin'."

"It's as much if you ever see the outside of a school, let alone the inside."

"Huh! I don't see no college diploma tacked up

beside your shavin' glass," wheezed Stetter, so asthmatic now that he could scarcely make himself heard.

"I want you to understand," declared the rheumatic one, resting heavily on his cane and glaring at the other, "that I went twenty-seven consicutive weeks to the Bald Apple school back in east Kentucky—an' I was learnt a-b-c's before that."

"'Twenty-seven weeks'? Dog-gone my cats!" ejaculated Stetter. "And you makin' all this stew about eddication? Listen at him, Sam! Ain't he the limit? Ain't he the limit?"

"Well, what more can you show—or Sam Killock, either?" demanded Crane. "I was a smart boy, an' I learnt what I did learn fast."

"You had to," admitted Stetter, coughing and wheezing his delight. "You had to be plumb fast. No two ways about that! Twenty-seven weeks! My soul!"

"Listen at him, Sam!" exploded Neb. "You'd think that wasn't no time to go to school. I learnt to read an' write and cipher——"

"Oh, my soul!" repeated Stetter. "Why, you poor wreck of humanity! how long did Si send Gypsy to school over to Deer Lick?"

"Well, she went off an' on for three year. I don't set myself up to be the ekal of Gypsy. But I'm dog-goned if I ain't the ekal of you or Sam when it comes to bein' a scholard."

"Listen at him, Sam!" wheezed Eben Stetter.



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"Of all the old blow-hards that ever come into this neck o' woods—Say, you Smart Aleck! let me tell you I went to school more'n you ever dreamed of goin'. Why, I went regular for three winters before Ma died and I went to work for old Man Slocum. And the neighbors made him send me to school some. An' he did. He made me go there an' build the fire every winter mornin', an' I got to read a lot that was on the blackboard."

Stetter had to stop for breath. This was a particularly long speech for him. Crane's face had fallen greatly. He said:

"By gravy! is that so, Eben? Did you get to go to school for three whole winters?"

"Yes," wheezed Stetter pompously. "You an' your measly twenty-seven weeks! An' I bet Sam's had more schoolin' than both of us put together."

"I—well—maybe he has," admitted Neb, the wind quite taken out of his sails. "How about it, Sam?"

"You're both wrong, same's usual," returned Mr. Killock. "I never went to school at all."

"What?" gasped the other two old fellows in unison.

"I never went to school," repeated Killock, and there was pride rather than shame in his voice as he made this confession. "I didn't have to go to school. You see, I was brung up by an uncle—Uncle Ezra Pegg. And he was a gospel sharp."

"Hi! Yi!" chattered Crane. "A parson?"

"That's what!" admitted Sam. "He knowed more in his little finger than could ordinarily be packed into two common heads. Yes, sir, Uncle Ezra knew 'stronomy, and fishiology, and elgebra, and—and—yes, by gum! he knew this calisthenics you hear tell of, too. That ain't no new study, if the teacher did want to introduce it over to the Hog Holler schoolhouse an' they run her out.

"Uncle Ezra," proclaimed Sam Killock emphatically, "knowed about all there was worth knowin' that a feller could get out of books. 'Course, 'twasn't none of it practical or worth a pink dern in the woods or around a sawmill. But some that he learned me has stuck—'specially the Bible. He made me learn whole slathers of Bible, till I was as well acquainted with them old fellers like Moses an' Naron, and Saul, and Tarsus as Neb used to be with the saloon keepers along Front Street in Blainesburg before the town went dry."

Crane did not even take offence at this uncalled-for dig. His spirit was quenched. Stetter observed:

"I guess we've got to hand it to you, Sam. You've got us both beat when it comes to eddication. You was favored like them rich guys favor their young 'uns—with a private tutor."

Crane would have agreed, only he chanced to turn toward the road and saw H. Harvey Stafford where he stood listening to their argument.

"Hi! Yi!" ejaculated the rheumatic one.

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"Here's the Duke of Hi-kackiyak come visitin'. Look around, you fellers, and see what's eased in on us when we wasn't lookin'."

Killock got up at once to do the honors.

"You lost your way, I guess?" he intimated. "I expect you want to know where you're at?"

"No. I'm quite sure of my location," Stafford said easily. "This is the homestead of the three gentlemen noted throughout the tall timber for their existence together in the bonds of brotherly love—in other words, Messrs. Killock, Stetter and Crane. Good-day, gentlemen."

"Dog-gone my cats!" wheezed Stetter.

"Hi! Yi!" ejaculated Neb Crane under his breath.

"You seem to be a heap familiar with our records, Mister," observed Sam Killock, scowling portentously. "What might your business be?"

"It might be selling corn-plasters," the caller said cheerfully. "But it isn't. I've ridden up here from Tall Timber Junction to get acquainted with you hardshells. My name is Stafford, and I fear you have a very unfavorable opinion of me because I am at the head of a big corporation whose methods of business seem entirely wrong to you."

"By gravy!" ejaculated Neb Crane, "you're the head of them timber thieves."

"Regular gang of robbers!" wheezed Stetter.

"Huh!" snorted Killock, "it's safe for you to come forward and take a cheer, Mr. Stafford. Nobody here won't hug an' kiss you."

"That is exactly why I have come up here," replied Stafford, with his very best smile. "I knew I should be just as welcome as a small-pox epidemic."

"Or poison ivy," muttered Crane.

"Such being the case, we can make no mistake at the start," went on Stafford. "I am here representing my company's interests. There is nothing altruistic about me."

"Come again!" interposed Killock. "What's that 'altruistic' mean?"

"In other words I am working for myself and my partners. And I take it you gentlemen are interested in your own side of this Patterson matter. The Patterson claims, you know."

"Huh! Yes," Killock said, "we most certainly intend to be watchful of Gypsy's interests."

"Meaning Miss Patterson?"

"Yes."

"I understand. Your representative—that young half-breed—came to me in New York."

"He went on his own hook," Sam interrupted. "Wasn't none o' Gypsy's money spent by him."

"Indeed? Then he is altruistic?"

"If you mean that he's plumb foolish, I wouldn't agree to quite that," Sam said cautiously. "But he spent his own money—an' on a wild-goose chase, seemin'."

"You mean that his report of his visit to me was not encouraging?" suggested Stafford.

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"I opine," Killock said drily, "that you didn't meet him with no brass band and an address of welcome."

The city man laughed—and his laugh was infectious.

"Really, gentlemen——You're Mr. Killock? And you are Mr. Stetter? And this gentleman is Mr. Crane? Thank you. I'm really glad to know you all.

"I take it we are all in favor of helping ourselves. If any of you has a dollar in his pocket he does not go around hunting for somebody to give it to. Remember, please, that I represent a good many dollars. The A.C.T.C. is a big concern. And I must answer to more than myself for the expenditure of every dollar of the corporation's funds.

"To admit, offhand, counter claims that amount to thousands of dollars' worth of timber—and timber that the A.C.T.C. has considered rightfully its own for twenty years or more—is a matter not to be decided without due caution. Si Patterson made these claims before he died. Neither my father nor his partners would allow them. Patterson put forward no evidence to prove his rights, as he called them. He did not go to law about the matter. Why should I consider that the organizers of the American Consolidated Timber Corporation were wrong and deliberately rob myself and the present stockholders in the corporation just because these

claims are reiterated for Patterson's adopted daughter? Tell me that?"

"You never denied them claims to Si," said Crane snappishly.

"You just salved him over an kep' him from either cutting his timber or going to law about the options," Stetter interjected.

"Hush up, you fellers!" commanded the more shrewd Killock. "Mr. Stafford wouldn't talk so much if he didn't have something to offer. What is it, Mr. Stafford? You're countin' on compromising, I guess. What's your offer for Gypsy Patterson's rights?"

## CHAPTER XIV

### SPARRING FOR AN OPENING

HARVEY STAFFORD realized right at the start that, lacking education, as these three old fellows did, they were not without business shrewdness. Legally he might win all his points in the controversy, but as man to man he was not likely to get the better of Killock, Stetter, and Crane.

Half an hour's quiet conversation with the three timbermen proved this to Stafford—and more. The old fellows were positive that Si Patterson had not been bought out when the American Consolidated Timber Corporation was formed, and at no subsequent time had he been paid an adequate sum for his holdings.

The mere fact that certain deeds, once recorded in the old county record books now destroyed by fire, had not been found by Si Patterson's partners, did not settle the controversy by any means. Stafford was quite aware of that. And knowing what he did regarding the errors in certain deeds to the corporation more lately recorded, the president of the A.C.T.C. realized he had no plain sailing before him.

It was to his advantage to placate the three old timbermen as much as possible, and while he had the opportunity. He, therefore, assumed the attitude of a perfectly fair and honest man waiting for his antagonists to prove their side of the controversy.

Considering his intent regarding Gypsy, he did not wish to antagonize her three old friends. He set himself the task, instead, of winning their liking. And Harvey Stafford could easily do this.

He was in the first place a man's man, and generally knew how to deal with them. In spite of the drawback of his lack of much woods experience, he quickly gained the interest of the trio. He could tell a good story, and he gauged their capacity for fun just right. He soon had them laughing both with and at him. It was not long before their side glances at each other said as plainly as words that he seemed to be "a regular fellow," after all.

All the time they were discussing the Patterson claims Stafford was careful neither to take nor give offense. He would not admit, he frankly declared, that the contention of Gypsy's three representatives had a leg to stand on. But if they could show him—even if his own lawyers could find flaws in the timber corporation's claims—he was ready to "do what was right."

"You must remember, gentlemen, that our corporation was formed and the bulk of our holdings obtained long before I came into power. Personally, I have little knowledge of boundaries, or



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claims, or what not. So you must not expect me to give any snap judgment on any contention whatsoever."

"No. I expect that's so," observed Sam Killock. "You wasn't out of short pants when your father and Lemoyne and those other chaps began working through this country. Lots o' folks had timber claims at that time that they didn't consider would ever be worth a penny. There wasn't no mills and no market. But Si Patterson, he knew! There wasn't nothin' green about Si."

"That's what," pronounced Neb Crane.

"Surest thing you know," wheezed Eben Stetter.

"I'll have our titles searched," said Stafford, with apparent frankness. "Meanwhile, you say you have a year to make settlement with Patterson's ward?"

"About that," admitted Sam.

"Then we are not rushed for time. The trees will stand, I guess, until the matter is settled one way or another. Did you say Miss Patterson lives up this way?" pointing.

"Right through that gate an' up that path, Mr. Stafford," said Crane.

"I have already met the young lady once. It was the other day and near Tall Timber Junction. Perhaps she told you?"

"We ain't seen Gypsy since John Longfoot was caught in the drive the other day and got his leg busted," Sam Killock said, while Crane and Stetter stared in surprise.

"Ahem! There's a matter," Stafford said, rising from his seat. "I'm frank to say I took a dislike to that half-breed when he was in to see me at my New York office. Do I understand that you three gentlemen represent Miss Patterson, and that nobody else does? I don't care to do any business with this Longfoot."

"Why, John only thought he was helping us when he went to New York to see you," Stetter said.

"I don't like his ways," said the city man briefly.

"He ain't—officially—got a thing to do with Si Patterson's estate," Crane remarked.

"Us three was all that Si named in his will," added Killock.

"Ah! Then we may as well eliminate the half-breed from the proceedings," Stafford said lightly.

"Well, say! There's Bob Larrabee. He's been helpin' us," drawled Sam. "We three don't know much law, and Bob's a lawyer."

"Oh, yes. Your counsel," said Stafford. "Of course you will want legal advice every step of the way. But personally I would rather not meet that half-breed on any ground."

"Guess John won't butt in none," Sam said gruffly. "He ain't much given to goin' where he ain't asked."

Stafford ignored the lanky man's remark. He said cheerfully:

"I am going to ride up to see Miss Patterson at her home. She was kind enough to invite me to call

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when I came this way. I am happy to have met you gentlemen."

He shook hands all around. He mounted, rode through the gate, and into the path to Paradise. The three old men were left eying each other.

"What d'you think of him?" sputtered Crane.

"I should say he didn't favor his father much," whistled Stetter.

"I don't know. Seems a purty decent sort, after all. But you can't tell how far a toad kin hop by countin' of its warts," decided Sam Killock.

Harvey Stafford paced his horse up the cathedral aisle of giant pines without eagerness. He was eminently satisfied with his interview with Killock, Stetter and Crane. The coming call upon Gypsy he likewise expected to aid his plans. One thing he had marked during his quiet observance of the three old men and his listening to their argument on education. Gypsy had been sent for three years by Si Patterson to the Deer Lick school, and Stafford knew that to be one of the better Western schools. The girl had obtained a broader education than he had supposed. And yet, she had displayed the fact during their conversation on the old wood road, and that was what had so puzzled him at the time.

It might be that the girl was more sophisticated and better informed than he had at first believed. This suggested his being more careful in his methods of approach. It made the chase the more

difficult. Stafford did not mind that. He was not one of those sportsmen who expect to hook a fish at every cast.

Gypsy seemed to him a prize well worth winning. And in this game, so he considered, the greater the effort the greater the prize.

He rode up to Paradise with the odor of the sun-heated pines in his nostrils, the flash of jays before his eyes as they winged through the forest, and a feeling of peace and contentment within him that was quite new to the usually harassed and energetic business man.

For one thing, he had slept nine hours each for two nights past and had awakened on both mornings, as he expressed it, "as fresh as a daisy."

He considered his friends of the big city in his present environment and laughed aloud. Trueford, his secretary, for instance, who considered a single fly in the offices an affliction—why, old Trueford would be horrified if he had to sleep in the room Stafford occupied at the Lumberman's Rest, with its cracked china toilet-set and its cheap maple furniture.

And Grace Lemoyne! He must write her a line. He had promised to. If he should tell her of the apparent discomforts of the hotel and how he lived there, she would not believe him. He tried to imagine her at the Lumberman's Rest and failed to accomplish the wonder.

He felt that, physically, he would be another man

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if he lived this clean, out-door life for long. He felt no need for cleansing the inner man. The soul of H. Harvey Stafford was as yet but lightly touched by his new environment.

He could appreciate the beauty of the day, and the beauty of the forest. Just as he had always found an appreciation of good pictures within him, so his inner sense now awoke to the charm of Tall Timber.

The fact that he was deliberately attempting a most wicked thing did not scorch his conscience. That faculty had been pretty well lulled to sleep in the last dozen years. He was merely reaching out for what he wanted, and if he could get it why should he hesitate because of any ethical consideration?

Had Stafford known what a flutter in the dove cote his coming to Paradise was making at that very moment, he would have considered half his task of winning the water sprite, as he insisted upon thinking of Gypsy, already accomplished. He had been spied while yet he was a long way down the path; and as he mounted the knoll slowly a metamorphosis was in progress in the lodge on Paradise Knoll and in its two occupants.

Aunt Tabitha wished to "rid up" the parlor. She seized dust cloth and broom and started for that already shining but crudely furnished apartment.

But Gypsy gave one look into the room, and quietly, but firmly, closed the door.

"We'll entertain him on the porch," she said to the excited old woman. "It will be beautiful there, with the sun on the maples and all. He doesn't have to see how we live."

Aunt Tabitha missed this last. "I think myself the porch is a real pretty spot," she agreed. "I don't know but I'd better put on my figgered organdy."

"I would not be too dressy," laughed Gypsy. "Don't let him think we've dressed up just for him."

"Why not?" demanded the old woman.

But Gypsy could not explain her reason. She did not dress up much herself, in spite of Aunt Tabby's loud expostulation. She merely put on a fresh house dress; but it was pretty and becoming. And there were fresh cherry ribbons in her hair and others at the neck and the elbow-sleeves of the frock.

When Stafford rode up and hailed in approved Tall Timber fashion, she went around the house to greet him. His gray eyes darkened with a repressed emotion that Gypsy was far from understanding.

Her shapely body encased in the simple gingham was a positive shock to him. She stood in the glare of the sunlight and it seemed to Stafford that the girl was all but transparent. She was so slight, with all her roundness and charm of figure, that she seemed more ethereal than when he had previously seen her.

And like a bronze statue was she! Just as though

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she were shaped by some master hand for an ornament rather than human use. The cherry ribbons set off her deeply browned arms and neck, making her as gay as any robin-redbreast in the bush.

"Good-day, Mr. Stafford," she greeted him. "Won't you 'light?"

"Gladly," he told her, dismounting with promptness. "Shall I tie my horse to this post? Thank you."

He came briskly through the sagging gate and she gave him welcome. He had swiftly removed his gauntlet to accept her brown, plump little hand and he held it just long enough for her to withdraw it with insistence. But she only laughed up at him; she did not take offence.

"Come right around to the porch and sit down. I want you to meet Aunt Tabby," Gypsy said.

"Then you do not live alone in this garden spot?" he said.

"Aunt Tabby has been with us since I was a little girl. You know, Uncle Si found me when I could just toddle. He adopted me; but I always called him 'Uncle.' "

If Stafford was disappointed he did not show it. But he laughingly said:

"I had the idea you occupied a sort of Adamless Eden here."

"There are two Eves at Paradise," she told him, her eyes dancing.

"'Paradise'? Is that what you call it?"

"Paradise Knoll," she replied, leading the way. "Here is Aunt Tabby, Mr. Stafford—Miss Tabitha Murdock. Mr. Stafford, Auntie."

"Land's sake!" ejaculated the old woman, creaking out of her chair to meet the man's outstretched hand as he came up the porch steps, "you don't favor your father none. I remember him well. He had hay-colored hair, turning a mite gray, and there was a wart on the side of his nose."

"You did know my father!" exclaimed Stafford, surprised.

"True word! Over to Blainesburg. You're a heap better looking than ever Henry Stafford was."

"Thank you!" chuckled the president of the A.C. T.C. He could appreciate the old woman and her frankness. His father had not been a handsome man.

"Sit down, Mr. Stafford," Gypsy said, offering a chair.

"Make yourself at home," urged Aunt Tabby, "I've got some greens on boilin' and a piece of our own pork. Won't you have a snack before you go?"

"That is kind of you," agreed Stafford.

This was not just what he had expected. This wholesome old woman for a chaperone surprised him. The lodge Si Patterson had built here in the wilderness was a surprise as well. And Gypsy her-



self—fitted into this simple home environment—was not at all as he had expected her to be.

He saw no backwoods crudities, no mark of rough-and-ready life, on Paradise Knoll. If they were poor and lacked luxuries, they were not without refinements here. Increasingly was he convinced that, after all, he must revise his opinion of Gypsy Patterson for a second time.

She was no half-tutored child of nature, easily to be overcome and led astray by his sophisticated guile. Stafford began to realize that the girl, while free and hearty in her manner, knew how to hold him at arm's length. Yet the more he came to understand that she was not an easy prize, the more her value increased in his eyes.

He was able to learn a deal more of Gypsy's private affairs now than through the girl herself, for Aunt Tabby was fain to gossip and he encouraged her. He learned how Gypsy had been missed, how lonely Paradise had seemed, when she was away at school.

"Si and me, we used to mark off the days on the calendar till the time she'd come back," the old woman said, with a sigh. "Mebbe Si didn't do all he might for her in the way of schoolin' because we missed her so here. True word! But we was lonesome!"

"I'm going to make it all up to me, when I get my money," Gypsy declared, laughing. "I'm going

to take Aunt Tabby, and we are going to the city."

"True word! What I'll ever do away from the tall timber, I don't know," said Aunt Tabby. "And I ain't got a thing fitten to wear."

"We'll get things to wear. And we'll go to balls and theaters and the opera. And we'll have an automobile."

"One o' them flyin' things?" gasped Aunt Tabby. "You couldn't hire me to step into one."

"No; those are aeroplanes. But we'll have one of those carriages run by gasoline."

"Guess I shouldn't like it," objected the old woman. "A horse is tricky enough, and gasoline, I hear, is more explosive. But I should admire to see the opery."

She went in to attend to the boiled dinner. Stafford asked:

"When your uncle's estate is settled you expect to have considerable money?"

"Oh, yes. And more as the timber is cut off. Look at this hard wood in front of you," she said with a gesture that indicated the maple grove. "John Longfoot says there is ten thousand dollars in that alone, laid down at the mill."

Stafford ignored the mention of Longfoot's name although it secretly angered him.

"You think that Patterson owned several pieces of stumpage about here?" Stafford asked.

"He said once he owned more than any one man

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in Tall Timber," Gypsy said simply. "And I believed him."

"But he never turned any of it into money."

"Not much of it. You should know about that, Mr. Stafford," the girl rejoined calmly. "He sold what he did sell to your corporation."

"I have come to believe that I do not know as much about my company's affairs as I thought I did," Stafford rejoined drily. "How was it, do you suppose, we did not buy these holdings of your uncle when we were buying out the other owners in Tall Timber?"

"Because Uncle Si knew the value of the timber, and at that time your father and his partners could not pay cash," she replied promptly. "Don't you know?"

"I am trying to find out," he told her humbly.

"Uncle Si said he had a verbal agreement with your father and his partners and had accepted payment for an option on his timberlands. I do not understand much about it," continued the girl. "But I am sure he never signed his rights away, and the corporation's option cannot stand forever. That, of course, you know."

"No. An option verbally agreed to could not be considered in force for long," admitted Stafford. "There certainly must be a mistake somewhere, Miss Gypsy. Believe me, the A.C.T.C. wants noth-

ing but what it has paid for. You shall not be robbed."

"Oh, I expect to get my rights," she said cheerfully. "Why! I am sure nobody would want what is rightfully mine."

"True. Least of all would I try to overreach you, my dear little lady. Your uncle may have left his affairs in bad shape. Unlearned men often do. But as far as in my power lies, you shall receive all that is your due."

"Thank you, Mr. Stafford," the girl returned simply. "Of course I know a gentleman like you would not think of taking advantage of me. You have so much while I have comparatively so little. And poor Uncle Si would turn in his grave, I verily believe, if he knew I was not being justly dealt with."

## CHAPTER XV

### SUSPICIONS

JOHN LONGFOOT's crew had sacked the rear of the second of his drives while he was hobbled to his cabin. Steve M'Graw came to report, and he and Sam Killock had paid off the men and deposited the mill company's check to John's account in the Tall Timber National Bank.

The timberman's capital was now upward of thirty thousand dollars. It was a goodly sum for the young man to have behind him at the beginning of the next winter's campaign. He could put a bigger crew into the woods than ever before with a full wanigan, and could demand the best end of any big mill contract.

But John Longfoot was not looking forward to his own aggrandizement at the beginning of the new logging season. Something else came first—to his mind.

He had not gone to New York on any wild goose chase. He was not merely an ignorant backwoodsman, as H. Harvey Stafford supposed him to be, trying to pit his wits against those so much sharper wits of the American Consolidated Timber Cor-

poration. John Longfoot had gone East for the purpose of seeing H. Harvey Stafford, the head of the timber corporation, and to measure him.

The timberman had taken Stafford's measure. Not for a single moment had the president of the A.C.T.C. either intimidated John Longfoot or bluffed him. But the latter knew more about Stafford and what he was likely to do when cornered than he would have learned in any other way.

To see the president of the A.C.T.C. had been the first move in the battle. Now, with his own business affairs out of the way and his money in bank, John Longfoot contemplated his next move for the benefit of Gypsy Patterson.

Being tied to the cabin, and at first to his bed and chair, would have sadly irked the woodsman had it not been for Gypsy herself. Bobolink had brought John's canoe up from the Junction as soon as the river was cleared of the drive, and in this Gypsy went back and forth each day in crossing the river to John's cabin. She declared he needed at first the daily ministrations of a professional nurse, and she had taken lessons in "first aid" at the Deer Lick school.

He was nothing loath to have her come. Gypsy was a gay and cheerful sprite, and had always been such. It was only occasionally that she was as disconsolate as she had been on that evening at Paradise when he had returned from New York.

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His fiddle was often in his hands when the girl was about the cabin. In the first place, John was almost inarticulate about some things. Aside from saying the most bald commonplaces to Gypsy, his speech was little more than yea, yea and nay, nay. The deeper thoughts of his soul seemed locked behind his teeth.

But the fiddle could talk for him—the fiddle and his flashing eyes. With the instrument hugged beneath his chin and his luminous brown-black eyes following every movement of the girl about the cabin, John Longfoot's music would croon over and caress her until she laughingly confessed herself bewitched by it.

This was not the rude music of the timber camps or the bits of harmony he had picked up from hearing others play; it was original with himself—springing from deep within his heart and soul. It was the wail of the wind lost in the empty forest, the clatter and laughter of the rill, the thrilling voices of the swamps by night, bird songs, the roaring of the river at full flood, and the organ-like notes of the huge, swaying tree tops when the gale sweeps through the tall timber.

This wild and untamed music—as natural and unhampered by civilization as the man himself—had taken a new tone to Gypsy's ear of late. She had always known John Longfoot. He had been her playfellow when she was only a toddler at

Paradise Knoll. If she had not looked upon him as a brother, she had always considered John a very dear friend.

But when he came to include her future in plans for his own, the girl coyly evaded the issue. Was it mere maidenly reserve? Or did Gypsy Patterson hesitate to link her fortunes with a plain lumberman of the tall timber?

She heard John Longfoot's heart calling her through the fiddle-bow; but she did not respond. At least, not openly. And during these days of John's affliction she held a secret from him that seemed scarcely worth the keeping; yet the girl felt that she could not discuss it with her old friend.

This was the knowledge of the presence in Tall Timber of Harvey Stafford. She never mentioned the city man to John Longfoot. The latter heard of Stafford's coming from Steve M'Graw. And Steve knew nothing of the visitor's frequent visits to Paradise Knoll. During the two weeks and more of John's confinement to his cabin none of the three old men from Breakaway got over to see him, for they were busy making their garden. He was almost wholly out of touch with the trend of affairs.

He suspected that no idle curiosity had brought the president of the A.C.T.C. to Tall Timber. Perhaps the battle that he had foreseen would be on much sooner than he had expected. He did not



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intend, however, to be forced into action by the "enemy," for so he thought of Stafford, and so have his plans for Gypsy's welfare set at naught.

He could not find words to tell her how grateful he was for her ministrations, and especially for her courageous canoe trip to the Junction for Doctor Hewitt when he was hurt. Studying one day on how to show her his appreciation of her kindness, he got Bobolink to hand him down the latest catalogue of a Chicago jewelry house, and from it he selected a piece of jewelry that he believed would please Gypsy, who had so few ornaments.

M'Graw sent the money order for him and brought the tiny box up from Tall Timber Junction when it arrived by registered mail.

"Open her up," said M'Graw, filling his pipe. "I want to see what she's like after what I went through to git it. That agent made me sign two receipts, and with my 'full' name; though I told him I'd been dead sober for more'n two years and my 'full' name didn't count no more. I guess he'd made me show up the strawberry mark on my left shoulder-blade if he'd knowed I had one to identify me by.

"Dog my cats, John! ain't that a beaut?"

Longfoot had snapped back the hinged cover of the box and displayed on its velvet lining the heart shaped locket and gold chain. In the face of the locket blazed a perfect diamond of moderate size.

"So that's what you spent purty near two hundred dollars for," muttered Steve. "Well, it's plumb worth it."

"Never mind what it cost. You're to forget that," Longfoot said severely.

"All right—all right. I'll remember to forget. But she is a beaut, and no two ways about it!"

There awaited the moment of presentation. Longfoot trembled with desire to lock the chain about Gypsy's neck. He wished to see her eyes flash and fill with delight, her sweet lips smile, her whole countenance light up with the emotion the gift would arouse in her.

But Gypsy did not come. Of course, he was getting around now without even a cane. His mangled leg had healed well, and he merely walked a bit stiffly as a reminder of the accident.

He had other visitors, however, and all of them were full of gossip about the coming of H. Harvey Stafford to Tall Timber; and most of these tale-bearers expressed their suspicions of the reason for "the big boss" coming West. It lay with Gil Martin, however, another contractor like Longfoot, to bring most disquieting news about the president of the A.C.T.C.

Gil was neither a wise nor well established timberman, but he was struggling to get ahead, and, like Longfoot, had contracted with one of the American Consolidated Timber Corporation mills to

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deliver his cut of logs from farther up the Brindle.

"But, my Godfrey, John! they've got me sewed up in a sack. What do you suppose Grey, the mill-boss, says?"

"I haven't the least idea."

"That this H. Harvey Stafford, that never paid a mite of attention before as to how business was done out here, has been looking over the books and has marked off certain of us contractors, ordering that we are not to have any more credit on our spring drives."

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed Longfoot.

He needed no credit himself to move his timber, but he was well aware that some of the small contractors like Martin would be utterly ruined if such a rule was put in force by the A.C.T.C.

These small jobbers had spent all their money in cutting and hauling the timber, and in paying and feeding their crews. Now that the spring had opened it was the custom for those who needed it to obtain from the mill people the few hundred dollars necessary to meet the expenses of the drives.

The banks would not lend money on such security as timber on the banks or in the streams, but it had been a custom for the mills to do so from time immemorial. Otherwise some of the mills would often shut down for lack of timber, for the A.C.T.C.'s own crews could not supply all the logs needed to keep the mills running to full capacity.

"It is a sharp trick," grumbled Gil. "He's got

us foul and he knows it. It means a sheriff's drive for me, John, and I'm out my whole winter's work—and more."

"I see," the younger timberman said thoughtfully.

"They've got me," repeated Gil. "'Cording to contract, they'll save all payments due me for the swamping, the skidding, and my profit on the drive. I'm busted, John, if I don't get five hundred dollars right away—and that darned Stafford knows it."

"I don't suppose he is thinking of you personally, Gil," Longfoot said. "He sees a chance of adding ten or fifteen thousand dollars' profit on each drive he has to carry through because you fellows legally fall down on your contracts."

"It ain't fair!" wailed Martin.

"No. But it's business. His kind of business. The kind of business the A.C.T.C. has always done in Tall Timber," Longfoot said with some bitterness. "I suppose Grey advised you to throw up the contract?"

"Yes. But I don't want to, John. It's been hard enough to get this start. And I owe three or four thousand right now. If I had five hundred dollars —"

"You'd owe just that much more—and not to the timber corporation," said Longfoot bruskly. "You have no security to offer. The A.C.T.C. is naturally your backer."

"But they won't lend me the five hundred."

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"They will rather than lose your timber."

"They won't lose it. They'll hire men themselves and have a sheriff's drive."

"Don't let 'em!" cried John Longfoot, his eye suddenly flashing! "Tell Grey you'll start your drive to-morrow."

"What! Me, alone?"

"Yes. You, alone—if the A.C.T.C. won't finance you."

"But I've only got a part of my drive in the river behind the boom at Perrin Brook."

"That is all right. Tell Grey as long as he will not finance your crew, you will start the drive yourself."

"A one man drive, John! My Godfrey, it can't be done! It will ball up everything. The boys above me on the river couldn't get their drives down. I'd have to burst my boom with dynamite."

Longfoot waved his hand in a gesture of dismissal.

"Tell all that to Grey—if he needs to be told. Only tell him as though you meant to do exactly what you say."

"My Godfrey!"

"I'll lend you just money enough to pay for the dynamite. I imagine Grey will run hotfoot to H. Harvey Stafford and tell him what's what. Even he will hesitate a long time before he allows the whole river to be balled up at the time of the spring drives," and Longfoot laughed.

"Godfrey! John, you're a smart fellow," declared Gil Martin, and went away in high good humor.

Two days later he went upstream with his crew, and the drive he started—and the others behind his—were carried through all right. But Gil was not a fellow to keep his lips closed. The story of John Longfoot's suggestion of the "one-man drive" which had brought the A.C.T.C. to terms was widely circulated throughout Tall Timber.

Visitors like Gil Martin did not satisfy Longfoot, however, and why Gypsy ignored him for so long a time began to trouble the timberman. Perhaps she was expecting him to show his recovered strength by coming over to Paradise Knoll. It was not a long walk, for he could drive the canoe against the current now to a point opposite the Patterson lodge, and from there mount the slope through the maple grove.

Bobolink began to puzzle him, too, about this time. The Indian lad had trailed him for years, a willing slave had John Longfoot allowed it. Since the timberman had saved him at the time of the log drive and been injured himself, Bobolink could not do enough for his hero.

He was very jealous for John Longfoot. Shrewdly seeing what lay in John's mind regarding Gypsy Patterson, he watched the girl closely. He was not jealous of her; but for his friend, the tall timberman, he considered no "squaw" good enough.

About the time Gypsy stopped coming to John

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Longfoot's cabin, Bobolink began to hang around, John said, "like a sore-eyed pup with the distemper."

"What are you looking at me that way for?" demanded the big woodsman. "Are you planning some devilment, Bobolink?"

"Me no plan nothing," replied Bobolink sullenly.

"Talk straight!" commanded the man. "No 'split tongue' talk between friends, Bob."

"Me no serpent tongue, Longfoot," said the Indian lad, shaking his head. "I spe'k true word always to my friend."

"Better be straight with me," growled Longfoot, somewhat exasperated. "But I can see there's something on your mind. Do you want to go to your folks?"

"No. Mebbe so, some time—when get me squaw. No white squaw. Bobolink want red squaw make him camp."

"Huh! mighty particular, aren't you?" returned Longfoot, rather amused, although he did not fail to note the sly dig the boy was giving him.

Bobolink always ignored Longfoot's French blood. He considered the tall timberman quite as much of an Indian as himself. Then John said, apropos of the thought the boy had put in his mind:

"I wonder what's got into Gypsy that she hasn't been over here for nigh a week."

"Ugh!" grunted Bobolink.

Longfoot started and peered at the boy suspiciously. "What's eatin' you, Bobolink?" he demanded at last. "What about Miss Gypsy?"

"She busy," muttered Bobolink. "Too busy to come to my friend Longfoot, him camp."

"What's she busy about?" snapped the timberman.

"She got more friend same you," Bobolink said. "She ain't give of her time you no more. Other mans."

"What do you mean—'other mans'?" asked the puzzled Longfoot, not much troubled by the boy's words. He knew Bobolink's jealousy.

"Her city slicker," declared Bobolink. "Heap big chief—much money. My friend Longfoot look sharp, mebbe so white squaw no come here no more."

"Darn you, Bobolink! I believe you have picked up some gossip that won't do you a bit of good—or me, either. You are speaking of that Stafford, I bet. Has he been up to Paradise?"

He described the president of the A.C.T.C. swiftly, using more of the Indian sign language than words.

"Him her," Bobolink acknowledged. Then he told Longfoot how many times he had seen and watched H. Harvey Stafford at Paradise. "He ride hoss. Catch him easy."



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"I don't want him caught," the timberman said.

But he was puzzled. He smoked more than one pipe over it. Harvey Stafford a frequent visitor to the Patterson lodge? John Longfoot made up his mind that the president of the A.C.T.C. was making friends with Gypsy for no good purpose. But he did not suspect for a moment what the "city slicker," as Bobolink had called him, had in his mind.

## CHAPTER XVI

### AT OPPOSITE POLES

WHATEVER might be H. Harvey Stafford's intentions in making friends with Gypsy, John Longfoot believed that the city man could not get any of Si Patterson's property away from the girl. She could not sign any paper or give the astute president of the A.C.T.C. any power that would stand in law. For under Si's will she was still a minor.

That Stafford was in Tall Timber for some shrewd purpose connected with the timber claims, Longfoot was convinced. The president of the timber corporation had been disturbed by the inquiries he, Longfoot, had made in New York. He had come out here to fight any attempt upon the part of Gypsy's friends to unearth the facts regarding the dead timberman's holdings.

"If he'll come out into the open and fight, all the better," Longfoot determined. "I'll go over and see the old men and find out what they know about it, and then we'll go to Bob Larrabee and figure out our plans."

But it was really Gypsy he first intended to see when he left his cabin in the gully and paddled up

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stream in his canoe. The timber had not been cut on either bank of Brindle River between his cabin and the Patterson piece sloping up to Paradise Knoll.

It was hard wood upon both banks, and the ancient trees that bordered the stream entwined their branches overhead making a thickening umbrella as the leaves developed. As summer advanced, the then peacefully flowing river would be an odorous and murmuring tunnel in which one might drift and dream for miles. John Longfoot disliked the thought of destroying these umbrageous trees; yet they would never be worth so much at the mill as right now. A larger per cent. than he cared to have in a drive of his own would be "bug-holed" or would show signs of decay at the heart.

If these maples, for instance, could be rafted as far as the Crow Wing and down that stream to Fort Ripley, there was a furniture factory there that would give a top price for the timber. John Longfoot had already looked this matter up, and Si's old partners agreed with him that the maple patch should be the first of the Patterson timber holdings to the root of which the axe must be laid.

He beached his canoe in a quiet nook and climbed up the steep bank. He could just see the face of the Patterson house through the trees—a smudge of brown against a background of varied greens.

He took up his journey thereto with rather a limping stride. His heart glowed in his bosom at thought of meeting Gypsy again. The girl swayed such a power over this sturdy woodsman that he actually trembled as he approached her abode.

She would be at the back this morning, of course. The garden plot lay there, and Gypsy and Aunt Tabby worked their piece of ground with only some small help from the Uncles-all.

Longfoot took out the jeweler's box and snapped up the cover to look at the dainty gold heart and its sparkling stone. He greatly desired that Gypsy might understand the significance of the gift.

The diamond-set heart represented his own heart—if Gypsy would but accept it! John Longfoot was a shy man; indeed, in some matters he was almost speechless. The girl must understand without his telling her in words the longing that possessed him—that had possessed him, indeed, these many years.

He had watched Gypsy grow up from toddling babyhood into the winsome, compelling creature she now was. He had never thought of any other girl in all his life. While Gypsy had been away at school he had "gloomed," as Aunt Tabby called it, as though he had lost everybody and everything that was dear to him.

Nobody knew save John Longfoot himself how

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many times he had journeyed to Deer Lick while Gypsy was at school there, just to get a glimpse of her. And in those days he did not always have the railroad fare for such a long journey.

Instead, he tramped through the wintry forest, a hundred and forty miles in his brogans, marked Gypsy laughing with a group of girls upon the campus, and turned and walked back to Lonergan's Camp, where he was working, all within three days.

Then Gypsy Patterson had seemed as far above John Longfoot as the stars. But of late the successful timberman had begun to hope.

Not that the girl was more kind to him than heretofore. She had always been kind. It was not in Gypsy Patterson (or so it seemed) to be unkind to any living creature. But he could look back upon many, many sweet hours she had given him of late, before he had been hurt in aiding Bobolink.

It could not be altogether pity, then, that had caused Gypsy to show him so much consideration. She must really find in him something that satisfied her own desires.

He lifted the piece of jewelry from the box and allowed the glittering chain to sift through his fingers. The sparkling stone threw out its parti-colored lights, flashing into his bedewed eyes, where beams quite as clear were reflected.

Sweet Gypsy! Child and woman, she was the greatest thing in all the world to John Longfoot.

Nothing could ever fill his heart as visions of Gypsy did.

While thus engaged in thought and in contemplation of the gift that he believed would delight the childlike side of Gypsy Patterson's nature, Longfoot came to the grassy yard surrounding the Patterson house.

He did not encircle it by way of the kitchen, but went the other way so that he would not be seen from the windows. So he came quite unobserved upon a scene that shocked him instantly motionless.

A saddle horse was fastened at the gate of the enclosure. Just within the gate Gypsy stood with the man who John Longfoot had good reason to assume was both her enemy and his own.

He could not mistake Harvey Stafford. Nor was the man an unattractive figure, even to the eyes of the timberman. He could easily imagine that the president of the A.C.T.C. would by his very appearance hold the interest of a girl like Gypsy.

But that Si Patterson's ward, who had every reason to mistrust the corporation official, should have become so friendly with him amazed Longfoot. Stafford held Gypsy's hand, and she did not try to withdraw it. He patted her shoulder gently as he talked, smiling down upon her with an expression in his countenance that set the blood pumping madly through John Longfoot's arteries.

The discovery of this friendliness between Gypsy

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and Stafford—their more than friendliness it seemed—was like a physical blow to Longfoot. He staggered where he stood at the corner of the house and leaned for support against it.

Neither the man nor Gypsy saw the spectator. They were too much engaged with each other at the moment to notice the presence of anybody. Gypsy was smiling as she listened to her companion's earnest words. Her face uplifted to Stafford as he bent above her, her nearness to him, the whole attitude of the pair, revealed, John Longfoot thought, an understanding between the twain that could be translated in but one way.

The locket and chain slipped through his brown fingers and fell to the ground. He did not heed the jewel, but as he stepped back from the scene his heel ground the gift into the mould. Unconsciously he snapped shut the empty box and slipped it into the pocket of his mackinaw.

It was not until some time afterward that he discovered the jeweler's box was empty; but at that, John Longfoot threw it away.

Harvey Stafford's promised messages from Tall Timber had consisted for the most part of inconsequential scraps of news, a semi-humorous description of the people and the place, and several picture post-cards. Grace Lemoyne was too much engaged in her own frivolities to worry about the lack of warmth in Stafford's epistolary efforts.

She believed in neither of the old saws: "Absence makes the heart grow fonder," or "Out of sight, out of mind." She had almost got Harvey to the point of an actual proposal of marriage once; she could do it again and make sure of him the next time. Grace had no idea that any other girl—least of all any Stafford might meet in the wilderness—could influence him for long.

Yet, as the president of the A.C.T.C. prolonged his stay away from New York and from business, Grace began to wonder. It was not like Harvey Stafford. He was a man who prided himself on never taking a vacation while there was a loose dollar in sight.

Grace heard more than one of their friends remark upon Harvey Stafford's continued absence. Her mother was becoming particularly anxious, it seemed. But it lay with May Allison to awaken Grace finally from what Mrs. Lemoyne had already termed her "inexcusable negligence."

"Harvey Staffords do not grow on every bush, Grace," the astute Mrs. Lemoyne had observed. "And if you wait much longer for him to mellow, somebody will knock him off the twig, even if he is only half ripe for marriage. You mark my word!"

May Allison, one of those women whose tongues are split like an adder's, came bubbling over with news, to her "dear Grace."

"I got such a nice letter to-day from Will Hay-



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ward. You remember Willie Hayward?" gushed May. "He really took an engineering course, and is actually a full-fledged civil engineer, building bridges and tunnels and all that for the St. Paul, Minneapolis and Western and its Missouri-Southern branch. Just think, he is going to be a great railroad builder. Fancy!"

"You did not come to tell me just that, May," said the shrewd Grace. "I haven't any particular interest in Willie Hayward—nor have you."

"Oh, no! Of course not. We all know where your interest lies," laughed Miss Allison, her green eyes narrowing. "But that's just it. If a girl won't take the proper precautions in her own behalf, her friends have to take them for her."

"Meaning Willie Hayward? I tell you I scarcely know the man."

"How very sly you are," scoffed Miss Allison. "You know very well that the Missouri-Southern branches off the main line of the St. P., M. and W. at Tall Timber. Will Hayward has been there, and he writes me that he has seen somebody."

"Oh, May!" laughed Grace, much amused, "do you think you have brought me news? I know that Harvey Stafford is there, and what he is in Tall Timber for."

"You do?" gasped Miss Allison, her eyes snapping again.

"Yes. Quite so. Harvey consulted me about

it before he went West," said Grace, stretching a point to impress her gossipy friend.

"He did?" exclaimed Miss Allison again. "Then, who is she?"

"Who is who?" demanded Grace, at last roweled to a display of keener interest.

"That girl?"

"What girl?" now in a frankly puzzled tone.

"Gypsy, the girl from nowhere," replied May Allison, eying her friend narrowly. "Will writes that your Harvey Stafford is acting in a perfectly scandalous way with that creature."

"Dear me! Willie is quite a gossip, isn't he?" laughed Grace. "Poor Harvey! He cannot even be polite to the girl, I suppose, without creating a scandal."

This was really marvelous work on Grace Lemoyne's part. She had never heard Gypsy's name before. The person whose claims against the A.C. T.C., if proved, might cost the stockholders so much, had meant nothing to Grace. Indeed, Stafford had not gone into particulars on that point.

Therefore, when she could laugh so frankly at May Allison and withstand the sharp and suspicious gaze of that young woman's green eyes, she proved herself to be a splendid actress.

"Humph! read what Will says," May ejaculated and tossed the open letter into Grace's lap.

The latter picked it up with nonchalance. Nor

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did her expression change from merry to grave while she read this paragraph:

"Harvey seems to be running them close here. Nobody knows what he's up to. Told me he was rusticating for the good of his health. If he gets any healthier than he looks he'll have to see a doctor. Fishing, hunting, and all that. My eye! He's got a peach of a girl on the string—regular woodland beauty. One look at her would make the Midnight Follies look like last year's corn-stalks in the sere and yellow leaf. Believe me! this Gypsy is all the goods and then some. They call her 'The Girl from Nowhere,' and she lives all by herself somewhere in the tall timber. Pretty soft for H. Harvey, I'll tell the world. He's such a sly old fox around the chicken-coops of New York that it tickles me to get something on him here. And at that, I don't blame him, for this Gypsy girl would knock the eye out at Forty-second and Broadway—and you see some charmers there on a sunshiny afternoon."

"Dear me, such exuberance of language," drawled Grace. "Your Willie Hayward still writes like an undergraduate."

"You can't tell me, Grace Lemoyne, that you are no more interested than you appear to be," flashed May Allison.

"In Willie?"

"In the backwoods girl and Harvey Stafford."

"Oh! I certainly am interested. I presume he has to play the chivalrous knight, or something like that. Business is business," drawled Grace. "Poor Harvey! And he so dislikes anything or anybody crude or common."

"Ha, ha!" sneered Miss Allison, not altogether befooled. "This forest dryad Will writes about may not be either crude or common. Smarter girls than we are, dear, have been cut out by designing country chits. That kind Will describes has a charm for men, it seems. Besides, there seems to be a mystery about this Gypsy, and a mystery always makes its appeal to men."

But Grace managed to laugh again, and did not lose her self-control while her friend remained. After May Allison had gone she sat down to think the matter out.

With Stafford within sight and reach, Grace had been pretty sure of him. At least, if she had not brought him yet to the point of a proposal she believed she could hold him against any other girl he might meet in the city.

But Grace quite appreciated the danger of contrast and novelty with a man like Harvey Stafford. It was her own variety and changeableness—her butterfly nature—that had held the man so long interested in her. She realized this to the full. She

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understood, however, that the price of success in landing a matrimonial prize, such as Harvey Stafford, was eternal vigilance.

The man had been gone from his usual haunts for three weeks. He gave no sign of returning soon. When the mountain will not come to Mohammed, Mohammed does well to go to the mountain.

When it came to influencing her mother, Grace had to speak but one word: Stafford. Mrs. Lemoyne hated travel. The discomforts of trains and small hotels horrified her. The only backwoods life she approved of was at hotels in the Adirondacks in which there were porcelain baths.

But the news her daughter brought to her regarding Harvey Stafford's new interest in the tall timber awakened all the defensive mother-instinct in Mrs. Lemoyne. Had not Loraine Lemoyne been netted himself while he was visiting the lumber camp where she was cook? She never talked about it; but Mrs. Lemoyne had not forgotten the wiles she had used to make Grace's father think she was a vast improvement on any city girl he had ever met.

"Men give way to all their passions in the woods," she argued. "Without other women by to enter visibly into comparison with their backwoods inamoratas, some of the wisest of men lose their balance."

She said this to herself, however; not to her daughter. But she agreed at once that Grace was

right to be anxious. It would be well to take a trip through the West—as they had so often planned. They could stop off at Tall Timber.

If it were possible, they would get Harvey Stafford to go on with them. If “business” still held him there, they might remain over for a while in the backwoods town—though Mrs. Lemoyne shuddered at the thought. She had pictures of so many of those awful places in her mind.

She groaned at the prospect, but she was firm in her intent to do all in her power for her daughter—and herself. No Tall Timber beauty should turn Harvey Stafford’s head if she could help it. Mrs. Lemoyne knew men—especially men of Stafford’s class; and she thought she knew, too, the class of girls to which this “Girl From Nowhere” must belong.

## CHAPTER XVII

### TROUBLE BREWING

JOHN LONGFOOT did not continue down into Breakaway to the little farm of the three old timbermen. On the first occasion of his crossing Brindle River since his injury he came away from Paradise Knoll and the tall pines and went to his cabin through the gash on the west bank of the stream.

Like the hurt creature of the woods that he was, the man sought his lair, there to nurse his wounds. He even turned Bobolink out of the cabin. But the shrewd Indian youth, seeing his friend's face and knowing where he had been, understood. Without a word he made a temporary camp on the shore of the river below and began catching, splitting and smoking fish.

Without the first right to complain of Gypsy or to her, John Longfoot's very soul had been seared by the scene at Paradise. The girl had a right to do as she did; Longfoot had no hold upon her. He had never been able to bring himself to the point of asking for her love. The thought of the barrier between them of his mixed blood had always risen in Longfoot's mind.

Gypsy was not bound, not by the faintest promise or understanding. Yet the smart of his discovery was all the keener because the man she seemed to have chosen was who he was.

The distrust the woodsman felt for H. Harvey Stafford was deep and abiding. He had looked, for a moment at least, into the very soul of the president of the American Consolidated Timber Corporation as he stood over Stafford in his office that day in New York. The business man's mask had slipped for the instant, and John Longfoot had caught sight of an ugly and crawling thing—Harvey Stafford's self.

To see Gypsy Patterson become enamored of Stafford was a greater sorrow to Longfoot than his own loss of the girl. Besides, he felt sure the man was not honest. Dishonesty in business meant to the timberman's mind treachery in everything.

He could not trust Harvey Stafford with Gypsy's happiness. Why should such a man as Stafford come out here to the tall timber to fall in love with a simple woods maiden like Gypsy?

Longfoot did not misjudge the situation at all. He remembered the girl in the offices of the A.C. T.C.—the girl whom he had thought such a wonderful creature. She would be more like the type, he believed, that would attract Harvey Stafford.

This sophisticated, somewhat artificial city man would never seriously contemplate making a girl



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like Gypsy his wife. Such an idea was preposterous!

Innocent Gypsy knew nothing about the trail of passion that some men followed. The girl was as safe with the rough woodsmen of Tall Timber as she had been when she was in the girls' school at Deer Lick. Longfoot knew the hearts of the lumber crews.

But of all city men he had ingrained suspicions. The loose talk of certain traveling salesmen and tourists whom he had met at the Lumberman's Rest had given Longfoot a distorted idea of city morals.

In addition to this phase of the situation, there was the probability that Harvey Stafford had his shrewd mind set upon the Patterson timber claims—that in some way the wily man was attempting to gain Gypsy's agreement to plans that would, when carried through, impoverish the girl.

There was one thing Stafford might do. He might alienate her from the old timbermen—Killock, Crane and Stetter—and encourage Gypsy to ask the courts to take her affairs out of their hands. Hundreds of thousands of dollars might be at stake in the Patterson claims. If one claim was allowed against the A.C.T.C., others might follow in its train. Others besides the executors of Si Patterson's will would find the way to get out of the clutches of the big timber corporation. Stafford

was practically fighting for the business existence of himself and his fellow-stockholders. He was not the man to refuse to use foul means in a fight if fair means would not win for him.

So, after all, John Longfoot's heart-breaking discovery at Paradise came around to a scrutiny of Stafford's business ethics. The woodsman could not believe the president of the A.C.T.C. was honestly in love with Gypsy. Nevertheless, he did not overlook the possibility that the girl was very much interested in the city man.

And why should she not be attracted by Stafford's good qualities? The timberman realized fully how the other man's ease of manner and education must appeal to a girl as hungry for the world outside Tall Timber as he believed Gypsy to be. John Longfoot had no foolish idea that he could step in and heroically "save" Gypsy from the other man. He did not for a moment believe that Gypsy would need "saving."

If Stafford made the mistake of an offensive approach to the woods girl, Longfoot knew well enough he would then and there ruin any chance he might have with Gypsy. What Longfoot feared most was the slyness and guile of Harvey Stafford—that he would in some way get a strangle hold on the timberlands that should rightfully belong to Si Patterson's adopted daughter.

He had a proper appreciation of the business

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acumen of the three old men to whom Si Patterson had entrusted his daughter and his property. They were all three fairly shrewd old fellows—especially Killock, the “know-it-all.” But backwoods “horse-sense” seldom can compete with the trained mental powers—and the long pocketbooks—of men of the H. Harvey Stafford type.

As he had determined before, John Longfoot intended to take his own way in the matter of conserving Gypsy’s interests. He had not the slightest right to interfere in her affairs. And, under the circumstances, he was quite sure she would resent his doing so.

Nevertheless, he believed there was another angle by which the question of the timber rights could be approached; that of a straight out-and-out fight with the A.C.T.C. He decided to take this angle.

Hurt as he was by his discovery of Gypsy’s interest in Stafford, the timberman did not lay and lick his wounds for long. To-morrow was another day! The world—the world of his hopes and desires—might have been literally turned over by a single stroke of fate, but John Longfoot was man enough to rise above his pain and humiliation. He may have lost his love, but he would not stand by idly and see Gypsy lose her legacy.

The fight between Harvey Stafford and himself was on. He went this very next day to Breakaway to confer with the three old men. But in going, John gave Paradise Knoll a wide berth.

His injured leg gave him some trouble as he came down between the columns of pines to the Breakaway clearing, and he walked slowly. Therefore he distinguished the high-pitched voices of the old fellows before he came in sight of them, energetically engaged in the usual argument.

"It don't make a particle of difference!" reiterated Neb Crane. "What if she ain't twenty-one yet? There ain't nobody to say her 'nay'—not really. She's her own boss."

"She ain't! Gypsy ain't!" wheezed Eben Stetter. "She ain't nothin' but a child, and she don't know what she wants."

"She's a purty old-fashioned child, if anybody should drive up an' ask you," scoffed Crane. "She's a woman growed——"

"Si didn't think so, or he wouldn't have put her property in our care," interposed Stetter.

"We ain't got no right to stop her doin' what she wants to. Have we, Sam?"

"We've got all the right in the world to protect her, even against herself, ain't we, Sam?"

As usual the two quarrelsome old fellows put their disagreement up to the know-it-all. John Longfoot came in sight of the trio just as Crane and Stetter adjured Killock to pronounce judgment—so they could quarrel with his decision in unison, of course!

"Like as always, you're both plumb wrong," croaked Mr. Killock. "Ain't neither of you looked

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on both sides of this here question. I take it, you mean to say—has Gypsy a right to do as she pleases, law or no law, executors or no executors?"

"Yes," agreed Crane.

"That's it," from Stetter.

Sam eyed them from his chair with unbelievable scorn. "I say," he drawled, "you are both wrong, as usual. Morally, as the preachers say, Gypsy ought to have every right to do what she pleases, even now, with the property Si Patterson left her. She's old enough and smart enough, that's sure!

"But, on the other hand," went on Killock, with his most exasperating air of omniscience, "the courts won't let us give her any sech permission. We are held legally responsible for the conservation of Si's property, and that's what!"

"What did I tell you?" wheezed Stetter, in satisfaction, crowing mightily over Crane. "She can't do nothin'."

"She'd ought to be let to if she wants to," sputtered Crane. "That's what I say."

"Hold on, gentlemen!" John Longfoot said, limping up to the group. "That isn't getting you anywhere. As you have evidently appealed from Sam Killock's decision, suppose you put it to me. What does Gypsy want to do?"

"Oh! Hullo, John!" said Sam Killock. "How's the leg?"

"That you, Johnny? How's things with you?" wheezed Stetter.

"Glad to see you, John," said Neb Crane.

And all three of them gave unmistakable signs of embarrassment at John Longfoot's appearance. If he noted the fact he gave no sign as he limped to one of the chopping blocks and eased himself down upon it.

"What does Gypsy want to do about her property?" he repeated.

"Well—now—John," said Crane, with hesitation, "it ain't exactly what she wants to do——"

"It's what she might want to do," broke in Stetter, in an angry whistle. "An' I say she shouldn't be let."

"Come on! Dribble through a little information," Longfoot urged, good-naturedly. "You haven't said anything yet. How about it, Sam?"

"These tarnal fools are only talking to hear themselves talk, John—jest to get the gas off their stummicks, as you might say," scoffed Killock.

"I see," drawled the visitor. "Somebody must have driven in the bung of your information barrel. I understand H. Harvey Stafford is in Tall Timber?" he added, quite in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Yes. He's here," said Sam, while the other old fellows exchanged glances.

"Been to see you?"

"Yes. He's been," just as briefly.

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"What do you think of him?" pursued Longfoot, with perfect calm.

"Seems a likely young man," said Crane.

"Not much out o' the way about him," agreed Stetter.

"He's likely put his best foot forward with us," opined Sam Killock, more shrewd and cautious than the others.

"What's he got to say about the Patterson claims?" asked Longfoot directly.

"Not much," confessed Sam, while the others shifted uneasily.

"Does he make any offer?"

"Not yet he ain't."

"Look here," said Longfoot. "Are you fellows going to open up to me, or have you formed a secret society, agreeing not to take anybody else into this Patterson business?"

"Dog my cats!" murmured Crane.

"Well—now—John——" stammered Stetter.

"I'll tell you how it is, John," burst forth Killock. "There ain't nothin' been done yet. But Mr. Stafford seems to be reasonable. He's having the whole matter looked into before he goes back to New York by them that he says is experts. So we'll probably come to an agreement with him before that time."

"On what basis?"

"That ain't been decided."

"What does Gypsy want to do?"

"She wants we should settle it without any quarrelin'."

"Meaning without you fellows quarreling among yourselves," scoffed Longfoot, "or with the president of the A.C.T.C.?"

"Hi! Yi!" cackled Crane, who could appreciate the point.

"You are mighty smart, John," came from Stetter.

"She don't want us to quarrel with Mr. Stafford," Sam admitted.

"What do you fellows mean to do? Are you going to take what he offers—if he offers anything?"

"Well, if he sounds fair," hesitated Crane.

"That's what I say," wheezed Stetter.

"We ain't got no money to fight the timber corporation in court. You know that yourself, John," Sam Killock observed. "There ain't scarcely a smidge of money belongin' to Gypsy in the bank."

"Don't fret about that," growled Longfoot. "I can put my hands on enough to start something, at least."

"But, John!" whistled Stetter, "we couldn't use your money."

"No, no, John," said Crane. "Of course not."

"It ain't to be thought of," declared Killock.



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"What's the matter? I never heard such unanimity of opinion before on any subject from you fellows. What's the matter? Isn't my money any good?"

"It wouldn't be right for us to use it," Killock said.

"Not if I give it freely—for Gypsy's good?"

"It wouldn't do no good," muttered Crane.

"Haven't I any interest in the girl—same as you old fellows?"

"You'd do more harm than good, John," wheezed Stetter, shaking his head.

"I don't understand you," John Longfoot repeated. "You tell me what this means, Sam."

"Why—well, it's this way," Killock slowly explained. "Mr. Stafford seems to have a grudge against you. You must 've taken a fall out of him when you was there in New York. And he don't like you—no two ways about it. He's pointedly indicated that he couldn't come to any agreement with us about Si's claims if you had anything to do with the business. Of course, for Gypsy's sake——"

"I see," said Longfoot interrupting. "And has Gypsy agreed to this?"

"To what?"

"To shutting me out of any friendly move for the settlement of her affairs?"

"She don't know nothin' about it," put in Stetter.

"Ah! This is just an understanding between you three and Stafford?"

"Now, John——" began Crane, and choked and stopped.

Something in the glance of John Longfoot's eyes—black as jade now—halted him. Even Killock found no further word.

"You fellows are the doctors," Longfoot jerked out, rising. "Only, watch out! You've got somebody worth while to deal with in H. Harvey Stafford. Now, Eben Stetter, will you lend me your old pony? I've got to go to the Junction, and I don't want to try this game leg of mine too far."

"Surely! Surely!" wheezed Stetter eagerly.

It was rather an unpleasant situation for all of them. The three were glad of any change in the subject of conversation.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### A BIG CONTRACT

JOGGING along the tote road behind Eben Stetter's knee-sprung gray pony in the little two-wheeled road cart the asthmatic man had himself put together, John Longfoot ruminated with no hopeful mind upon the situation which had just been revealed to him.

While he was laid up with this injured leg, matters which he should have been watching had got out of hand. He needed no diagram to reveal to him why H. Harvey Stafford, in showing the most attractive side of his character to the three old timbermen, had linked up with his apparent friendliness the condition that John Longfoot was to have nothing whatsoever to do with the settlement of Gypsy Patterson's affairs.

Stafford must have complimented Longfoot by believing that the latter would not be an easy person to swindle. Frankly, that was what the younger timberman believed Stafford to be up to.

After the angry declaration of the president of the A.C.T.C. in his New York office that any attempt of Gypsy's friends to demand a settlement

from the timber corporation would be considered blackmail, Stafford's sudden appearance in Tall Timber and his apparent friendliness with Gypsy and her father's old partners spelled but one word: Treachery.

Longfoot could not blame Killock and Crane and Stetter. From their standpoint and without the sidelight on Stafford's character which he had gained, they might easily consider they were doing their best for Gypsy when they agreed to satisfy an apparent whim on the powerful man's part which, it seemed to them, could not possibly affect Gypsy's affairs or their administration thereof.

At best, John Longfoot's interference in the settlement of Si Patterson's estate was entirely a personal matter. He had gone to New York only after long discussion of the business with the three executors, but he had gone on his own initiative and at his own expense.

Just how much influence H. Harvey Stafford had gained over Gypsy, as well as over the trio of old timbermen, Longfoot could not know. Indeed, he did not want to know. He knew better than to try to talk the girl out of any belief she might have gained in Harvey Stafford's good intentions. If she had begged the Uncles-all, as she called the old fellows, not to quarrel with Stafford, she must at least feel considerable interest in the city man, if nothing more.

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No, John Longfoot wished to feel perfectly free to do what he could to protect Gypsy and her property. He had an astute antagonist in Stafford. He quite realized this fact. Whatever he did he must not show his cards. Not yet.

He would go to Bob Larrabee and confer with him regarding the first move. He knew Larrabee was sharp. As far as Longfoot knew, the lawyer was honest.

In any case, having already been retained in behalf of the Si Patterson estate and been paid his fee for certain routine work, Longfoot presumed Larrabee would consider himself the estate's legal adviser. At least, John did not expect to find him friendly with the enemy.

Arriving at the Junction he tied the old gray pony under the shed behind the Lumberman's Rest and strode stiffly back to Railroad Avenue. As in most county towns, the lawyers had their offices as close as possible to the court house. Larrabee, as a modest legal limb, occupied a shabby office in a shabby building, but so close that the eavedroppings of the law from the court house all but sprinkled the low roof just above Larrabee's head.

There were two doors to the building in which the lawyer had his office. As Longfoot mounted the rear stairway he heard a door open and Larrabee's voice saying warmly:

"Yes, sir. Certainly, sir. I should be more than pleased to attend to it for you."

Larrabee's was a predatory face, with a lock of sandy hair brushed forward over each ear to suggest those "side-tabs" once popular among the younger professional men. For his face was quite hairless, and he would never be able to compass a real beard.

Longfoot halted with his eyes level with the floor. He saw a rather burly figure, the lower legs encased in russet riding boots with tiny spurs, billowy trousers above the knees, and a riding coat.

He did not hear the reply of Larrabee's visitor; but there could be but one person in all Tall Timber dressed like this. The man went down the front stairway. The timberman waited for the lawyer to reënter his office and close the door. Then he strode swiftly to the window at the end of the hall overlooking Railroad Avenue. He forgot his limp for the moment.

The man who had just left Larrabee went to two horses hitched at the rack in front of the St. Paul Emporium and mounted into the saddle of the big bay gelding. A brown pony ambled along on the lead-rein as the Easterner rode away toward the north. He was making for Breakaway Valley and Paradise.

John Longfoot sat at ease on the window sill and filled and lit his pipe. He sat for some time there, staring out into the lazy main street of the lumber town, and puffed on the pipe, thinking of many things. But his face remained imperturbable.

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He was not the man to do a thing on the spur of the moment. He had arranged—rearranged, in fact—his plans fully before he got up from the seat with his pipe smoked out.

He tapped the dottle out of the bowl and thrust the pipe into the pocket of his mackinaw. Then he strode silently to the stairway, turned there, and came back to Larrabee's door with the halting step which had become natural to him of late. He pushed open the door and looked in.

"Why, John! how do you do?" cried Larrabee, looking up from his hacked old desk. "How's the busted leg?"

"Still game," said Longfoot.

"Take a chair."

"Don't care if I do." He took the seat indicated.

"What's the good word?" asked Larrabee, very busy arranging papers on his desk. His hands shook. He had shot only one troubled glance at the timberman.

"Haven't had time to see you before, since I came back from New York," Longfoot observed.

"Oh, yes! You did go East, didn't you?"

This was said carelessly, as though it had quite slipped the lawyer's mind, being of so little importance.

"Yes," drawled Longfoot. "And I seem to have stirred up the muddy depths considerably. I see Harvey Stafford has come out here."

"So I understand," said the patently nervous Larrabee.

"He's come for his health, I am told," went on Longfoot calmly. "But I have an idea he is looking over the A.C.T.C. fences."

"It may be."

"Now, Bob," said the timberman, ignoring utterly the lawyer's studied lack of interest, "you know what we talked about along back—before I went East?"

"Why—yes. We did have some conversation about——"

"About Gypsy Patterson's rights under Si's will."

"'Hem! Ye-as. Something like that."

"Somebody's got to do something," said Longfoot vigorously. "Somebody's got to make a move to bring matters to a head. Don't you say so?"

"Why—er—what matters?" asked Larrabee rather faintly.

"You seem to have a mighty short memory," said Longfoot, suddenly eying the lawyer with concern. "What's happened?"

"Eh? I don't know what you mean."

"Well, you are for helping the old men and me do something for Gypsy, aren't you?"

"Why—I—anything that I can do—er—if I can advise you——"

"That's it," said Longfoot heartily. "It's advice I want. I'm going ahead to do what we talked



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about. It is what should have been done long ago. It will bring Stafford and his gang out of their hole, I don't doubt."

"What is that you'll do?" demanded Larrabee, with sudden sharpness.

"Well, what would you think of putting a gang of swamper into that hardwood patch of Si Patterson's up there west of Paradise? It is a piece those timber thieves have got on record as having been bought from a fellow named Crukshank. It's Si's home lot, as you might say. It includes his house and garden patch. And the timber on it is worth ten thousand dollars, if it is worth a cent."

"Do you mean you'd do that?" gasped Larrabee.

"Why not? If I can get the old fellows to agree to give me the contract. And they were willing to a while back. And you——"

"I advise your thinking twice before you jump," said Larrabee shortly.

"Yes?"

"I am not speaking as your legal adviser, I have no retainer in the matter—and I won't accept any," he added hastily, as Longfoot reached for his wallet. "But you are bucking a big concern."

"It hasn't grown any bigger since I talked with you about it before, has it?" demanded Longfoot.

"Hem! You are getting serious now, I see. I thought you were only talking then."

"Huh! You don't get me right," said Long-

foot. "I never talk just to hear my own voice."

"You'd take a contract to put in a gang of choppers, cut the trees, and raft 'em, when the title of the stumpage is in dispute?"

"Why not? If that's the only way to bring things to a head? Somebody's got to do something. The girl has no money. It is all tied up in these timber holdings we all know well enough Si owned. If I start cutting the timber maybe Stafford and his gang will loosen up and we can get a line on what they mean to do."

"It will cost you a lot of money, John," said Larrabee slowly, and for the moment he seemed sorry for the timberman. "Don't you know that in our courts it is the side with the most money that wins in all timber litigation?"

"Maybe. But I don't think to put any picayune sum into the pot. I'm willing to bet big. I've got thirty thousand dollars, Bob, and I'm ready to spend every last cent of it to get at the heart of this Patterson matter."

"No! Have you?" Larrabee's light eyes bulged and slowly his face reddened. "You—you seem determined, John."

"I am," rejoined Longfoot.

"I could not undertake to advise you—not now," sighed the lawyer. The mention of thirty thousand dollars made him lick his lips like a wolf. But he was evidently hampered by some secret that

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Longfoot could not fathom. "No. I couldn't see my way to encourage you to buck the A.C.T.C."

"No?"

"Stafford is a masterful man. And he's shrewd. You'll do well to think it over."

"I've beat him once," said Longfoot with a quick grin.

"Oh! You mean about Gil Martin's drive? But that was a small matter."

"You don't talk as you did a while back," Longfoot observed, staring at the lawyer keenly now.

"Well, this is something to go slow about. At least, that is the way I feel."

"I did expect," said the timberman, rising, "to get some little encouragement from you, Bob."

"Can't advise you!" reiterated the lawyer, shaking his head obstinately.

Longfoot gazed down upon him thoughtfully. Larrabee blinked his eyes like a rabbit in the sun. Really, the timberman seemed disappointed to the depths.

"Well!" he sighed, at last, and limped out of the office.

When the door was closed and the sound of his visitor's footsteps had receded into silence, the foxy-faced lawyer straightened up and smote the battered old desk a resounding blow with his bony fist.

"The dern fool! Thirty thousand against

thirty millions! John Longfoot bucking the American Consolidated Timber Corporation and H. Harvey Stafford! I'd like to know where he thinks he'll get off at?"

Thus he ruminated in the quiet of his office.

## CHAPTER XIX

### LONGINGS

HAD John Longfoot been near enough to Gypsy and Harvey Stafford at the moment he observed their intimate meeting on Paradise Knoll to have overheard their speech, the attitude of the two and the significance of their friendliness would not have much impressed even a jealous lover. And John Longfoot was not that.

He did not know that almost every day for a fortnight Harvey Stafford had been finding some excuse—or no excuse at all—for riding to Paradise and the Patterson lodge. He had not always gone by the farmstead of the three old timbermen, and therefore Killock, Stetter, and Crane had little idea of the closeness of the intimacy between the corporation official and Gypsy.

And yet, as has been said, had Longfoot been a third at that meeting by the gate at the head of the path from Breakaway Valley to Paradise he could have found little in what the two said to feed any jealousy.

It was the unexpected situation, the fact that Gypsy had hidden her personal intimacy with Staf-

ford from him, and Bobolink's intimations that smote John Longfoot so sharply and wrung his heart with such agony.

For what Gypsy was saying at that very moment of his observation of them was:

"Oh, Mr. Stafford, I love to ride. But I have not had a riding horse since I went to Deer Lick to school. Uncle Si never seemed to have money for one of late."

"If I might suggest something, Miss Gypsy?" the man had said quickly.

"Yes?"

"The man I bought this beast of has a beautiful brown mare that would suit you to a T—whatever that standard of excellence may be," and he laughed.

"But the Uncles-all can put their hands on so little money for me just now."

"Oh, that will be all right," he hastily interposed, patting her shoulder as though she were a child. "You are going to have plenty of money for such things when your affairs are settled. I would be glad to get the mare for you."

"I could not let you do that."

"On a bill," he completed, smiling. "The man will let you have the pony and wait for his money—for a year if need be."

"Oh, Mr. Stafford! Truly?"

"I am telling you, am I not?" he said, as though

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much amused. "You have but a faint conception of business."

"I—I—is that really business?"

"Taking a basket of eggs to the Junction and exchanging them for calico or candles is merely bartering," he laughed. "Business is another matter—a complicated arrangement of exchanges and credits in which real cash is scarcely more in evidence than in your bit of bartering."

"Why, I might even put my name on your note for the mare if Bill Brock needed the cash, and he could get the money at the bank. But the bank people would not expect to put the pony in the bank vault until she was paid for."

And of such was the warp and woof of the conversation that John Longfoot had observed but had not overheard. Gypsy gave the president of the A.C.T.C. her hand. They had thus ratified the agreement that she should have the brown pony. And from the window of the building in which Bob Larrabee had his office the timberman had seen Harvey Stafford ride away into Breakaway the very next day with Gypsy's mount.

The girl had, meanwhile, with pardonable vanity, made over her old riding outfit into a new "creation." She was a handy needlewoman, and by candlelight she had fashioned a skirt to fall over her riding breeches, and a crimson four-in-hand to be tied at the low, rolling collar of her blouse.

Pictures in the catalogue of a mail order house suggested ideas in dressmaking.

She owned presentable riding boots and an old saddle; but when Harvey Stafford came riding up the Knoll with the brown pony at the end of the lead-rein, the animal was already saddled with a much finer saddle than Gypsy had ever owned.

"Bill said the saddle went with her," the man declared boldly. "And here is a crop that I would like to have you accept as my own gift, Miss Gypsy."

"Mr. Stafford! You are doing too much!" cried the girl, hesitating for a moment before accepting the whip.

She felt somehow that this could not be all right. And yet, he did it so nicely—was so respectful, so pleasant, so companionable—that she could scarcely refuse his comradeship without rudeness.

For his part, Harvey Stafford amazed himself. He had allowed a feeling to expand in his breast regarding Gypsy Patterson that he had never dreamed, when he had arrived at Tall Timber, would develop.

He had left convention behind; both the convention that he approved in business life and that which had sometimes chafed him in social relations. With Gypsy Patterson he could not throw off all the restraints he had at first intended to ignore here in the tall timber; but there were other



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restraints of a more cultivated state of existence that she counted valueless.

She talked to him just as she would have had she been a man—rather a clean-minded, intelligent boy. Nothing of sex ever seemed to enter Gypsy's thought. This attitude kept Harvey Stafford following a line of conduct that he had by no means originally intended.

The feel of the rounded, palpitating body of the woods girl in his arms when he had caught her as she leaped from the precipice, remained with Harvey Stafford still. That hungry emptiness his arms had felt when she slipped out of them and stood in the woods road laughing up into his face had never left the man. If he could but hold her again against his breast!

That moment of contact—of physical possession—was a memory that gnawed at Harvey Stafford's heart like a canker. It seemed to him that his arms would never be satisfied again until Gypsy Patterson, of her own volition, should snuggle into them and lift those tempting, fragrant lips of hers to him!

"The prettiest girl in all the world!" he said over and over again to himself. "Jove! A man might well consider himself fortunate if he could possess such a girl. She would be worth—well—any sacrifice."

For he utterly put away thought of his education and what a more artificial community would

call his "social advantages." The fact that Gypsy had little knowledge of life as he knew it, and no experience whatsoever—no experience, for instance, such as Grace Lemoyne possessed—made slight impression now on Stafford's mind. He never compared Gypsy with Grace. The latter was a girl whom he knew in one world. Gypsy lived in quite a different world.

And he was himself living in this outdoor world now. He had thrown aside most of the cares and all the pleasures of his usual existence. With every breath of the pine-tanged air he breathed he felt himself changing—physically. But spiritually?

He fully believed his intention regarding Gypsy Patterson was the same as in the beginning. He desired to possess her—and he would! Just how he was to accomplish it he did not yet know. But he told himself that every kindness, every favor, she could be made to accept from him would bind her the more securely in that web he had originally determined should enmesh her.

In secret he would not admit that his feeling for the girl of the tall timber came from a purer source than passions he had experienced before. Gypsy's company satisfied his present mood more than that of any girl he had ever known. He realized that. But how would it be if she were transported to a gay and butterfly life among his companions in the city?

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In the woods setting, Gypsy shone a jewel of purest ray; but how would she appear in the big town—either in that half-world which Harvey Stafford knew very well or in the social whirl where Grace Lemoyne shone?

He shrank from seeing her in either city-setting—one, so it seemed to him now, hardly more tawdry than the other. Here in the freedom of the big timber she was superb! He could fairly worship her as though she were literally on a pedestal. Such a pretty, pretty girl! And with purity and goodness surrounding her like the evening mist that rose in the woodland twilight.

Perhaps the girl's purity defended her in truth as a shield.

In any event, Harvey Stafford found himself hesitating to attempt the reduction of the fortress of the girl's goodness. Since his first walk with her after their romantic meeting by the roadside he had never sought to give speech to those lower desires that writhed in the sediment of his mind like the serpents they were.

When the two began to ride together almost daily their intercourse became even more precious to Harvey Stafford. He wished to say or do nothing to set the charmed bird to fluttering. For more than one reason did he wish the girl to have perfect trust in him.

On Gypsy's part, she found Stafford's attentions

the most wonderful experience she had ever had. To be courted by a wealthy and clever man, an educated and handsome cavalier, went to Gypsy Patterson's head like the fumes of old wine. But she did not utterly forget all other interests in life.

As John Longfoot did not appear at Paradise after a few days, Gypsy set forth early one morning to go to his cabin, for she had really expected him. She followed the bank of Brindle River, its waters now but a murmuring brown stream, and came to the place opposite the gash in which John's cabin stood, and where the canoe had been left for her use while the timberman was recovering from his injury. The canoe was on the opposite bank.

Before she cupped her hands to "hoo-hoo" for her friend, she spied Bobolink's bark lodge below the gash. The Indian lad was at work smoking the day-before's catch of fish. She was some time in attracting his attention—at least, in making him admit that he saw her. He put John's canoe into the water and paddled sullenly across, the bow of the canoe high out of the stream, Indian fashion.

"Is John ill?" demanded the girl in a worried tone.

Bobolink shook his head, evidently in an uncommunicative mood.

"Is he at the cabin?"

Another shake of the head.

"Where is he?"

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Bobolink ruminated. He could scarcely intelligibly and honestly reply to that question without resorting to speech. So he returned, gutturally:

"He gone away."

"Where has he gone?"

"'Way off." Bobolink's gesture included most of the hemisphere.

"Tell me where he has gone to!" commanded the girl.

"Don't know. Mebbeso gone all summer."

"Never!" cried Gypsy. She saw the black eyes of the boy twinkle wickedly and knew he desired to puzzle her. "When did he go?" she asked.

"Two suns."

"Day before yesterday?"

He nodded. She thought a moment. Then:

"Did he take his rifle?" A vigorous shake of the boy's head was the answer. "Which way did he start?" Bobolink pointed downstream.

John Longfoot had gone in the direction of the Junction, and with neither rifle nor canoe. Gypsy's shrewd guess was that the timberman had gone farther than Tall Timber Junction, and that he had probably gone by train.

He was on no hunting trip or timber-cruising jaunt. Indeed, his lame leg would preclude such activities at present. She went back to Paradise with a feeling that all was not right with John. Why had he not been to see her? Did the Uncles-

all know about his journey, or had they not seen him, either? Faintly she felt condemned. In one particular she had not treated the timberman with that frankness which heretofore she had yielded him as a perfectly trustworthy friend.

She meant to go down into the Breakaway and ask the three old fellows about John this very day. She had deliberately kept from him the fact that Stafford had come to Tall Timber. Perhaps he had now discovered it himself. She suspected that Longfoot's trip to New York might have had something to do with the settlement of Si Patterson's affairs, although neither the young timberman nor the three executors had admitted it. And more than likely John's New York jaunt had brought Harvey Stafford West.

That Longfoot had now gone away again, and without telling her, puzzled Gypsy. They had always been such good friends that John usually discussed his personal affairs with her, and with frankness.

Meanwhile she rode with Stafford whenever she could. He was so often at Paradise for one meal or another that Aunt Tabby got into the habit of setting a third plate at the table. Aunt Tabby quite approved of H. Harvey Stafford.

"Of course, he parts his name on the side and his hair in the middle; but them's just whimsies—ain't to judge a man by such," the old woman declared.

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"That is, after you get to know him. He fixed his name that way because his father's name and his own first name was Henry; and in business their identities might get mixed. He told me so.

"As for his hair-parting—you take it from me, Gypsy honey, he don't part it in the middle because he has to balance a top-heavy brain. He's got plenty of good sense, Mr. Stafford has."

Gypsy was far from denying this. And the Uncles-all approved of Stafford, too. Four weeks of acquaintanceship had increased the good opinion of Killock, Stetter, and Crane regarding H. Harvey Stafford.

On this particular day, when the girl and Stafford set forth from Paradise bound on a longer jaunt than usual, although they went by the way of the old timbermen's clearing Gypsy had no opportunity to ask the latter about John Longfoot and his mysterious journey.

She and Stafford were riding to Mitt Mountain, far below the Junction, and they merely waved recognition to the three old fellows as they cantered past. Tall Timber people, too, were used by now to seeing the twain ride through the town, and their appearance was scarcely commented upon on this occasion, save by the station master, who ran out after the riders had crossed the railroad tracks and shouted futilely after them, waving a yellow envelope in his hand. Neither Stafford nor Gypsy observed this.

The trail to Mitt Mountain was through swamp-land, and a well timbered swamp is the most beautiful place in the world in the late spring. Every atom of life—both of vegetable and animal—puts forth its chief effort at this season to mantle the earth with beauty and fill the air and water with flashing forms of exquisite coloring and texture. All this, besides the bird songs and the organ notes of busy insects.

Here and there, too, were those pools among the pines—pools with no inlet or outlet, it would seem, lying brown and fathomless, as expressionless as eyes of dead men. These solemn ponds might be as shallow as a saucer or yards deep with mire; one could not be sure without probing. The riders evaded them as they rode on.

The sun's rays streamed through the clearings in the forest, here and there warming a part of the swamp and revealing more clearly its beauties.

"I often think," Gypsy said, "that I am in a great cathedral—like those in the Old World—when I am here in the tall timber. These beautiful columns of trees, the green domes overhead, all the sounds of nature mingling in a chorus of praise—ah, it must be wonderful to visit those real cathedrals, Mr. Stafford. You have been to Europe, you say?"

"More than once."

"How fortunate you are!"

"That is a matter of opinion. Frankly, the cathedrals over there did not interest me," he admit-



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ted. "I fear I prefer more modern structures."

"Oh, Mr. Stafford! Their beauty——"

"Believe me, your cathedrals here in the tall timber are far superior, to my mind."

"But that is because you have seen the others—the real," she sighed. "You have had the very things I long for! And you scorn them! Yes, I think I shall go to Europe when I get my money."

"I wonder if I could see the show places of Europe through your eyes," he murmured. But she did not hear him. She went on to say:

"I will see everything beautiful over there."

"And Aunt Tabby?" he asked slyly, his eyes twinkling. "Will you take her?"

"Oh, I had not thought of her," and Gypsy's laugh was merry again. "I could scarcely imagine Aunt Tabby on the Riviera or in Rome."

"True!" murmured Stafford, but watching Gypsy longingly.

"I am going to those beautiful places some time. I long for them so," the girl declared. "Just to travel—and feast one's eyes—and expand. That is what I long for, Mr. Stafford. Expansion! I am cramped for room."

"In all this?" he cried, with a gesture indicating the green aisles of the wood. "Why! you are longing for what I have just learned is narrowness and the limitations of a too civilized existence—the cities. For one city after all is much like another.

Believe me, dear girl, there is nothing satisfying in them."

"Would you be satisfied with only what I have?" she asked him quickly. "If you had had only a taste of better things, as I have, would you not long for a full cup to drink? I want to develop—to live!"

"I am inclined to deny just now that there are any better things," he said, watching her with quizzical gaze.

"I suppose we do fail to appreciate to the full what we have. I do; you do. But I know that I need the things that seem so common and worthless to you to round out my life. I feel cramped, I tell you!"

She still stared straight ahead down the long lane their horses were pacing side by side. His eyes glowed with animation as he watched her and listened.

What, after all, would be the result of these experiences the girl longed for if she managed to get them? What measure of culture could be grafted on this stalk?

With her perfections of form and feature, with her purity of soul, clarity of mind, ability to grasp and assimilate new things, Harvey Stafford saw as in a revelation a clear and lasting reflection of the woman this girl might make.

She would be wonderful! No mere toy was she

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for the satisfaction of his—or any other man's—passion. Curled within the soul of Gypsy Patterson was the germ of a great womanhood.

Should he seek to poison and wither that greater life at its very source? For the mere pleasure of possession—and that only for a comparative moment—should he quench in the girl these desires for development which she had expressed?

Or should he help her? Should he do what he could to aid her in that path that would surely bring her, as he suddenly realized, to the high fulfillment of her desires?

What might this water sprite, this wood nymph, this girl of the tall timber not become if she were helped and guided? Harvey Stafford's bosom swelled. His heart leaped. His eyes misted.

As his wife Gypsy Patterson would develop, he believed, into the noblest, finest woman he had ever known. His wife! *His wife!*

## CHAPTER XX

### ON THE UP TRAIN

AT St. Paul Grace Lemoyne and her mother entrained for the northwest. They gave up their comfortable stateroom and the luxury of the Overland observation platform, but managed to get chairs in what seemed merely a second-rate coach after the rather magnificent appointments of the special through train.

Grace had written Harvey Stafford of their sudden plan to make the trip to the Pacific Coast; but she had neglected to mail the letter until just before leaving New York—and with intention. She did not wish to seem to attempt a surprise; yet she was determined that her telegram from St. Paul, where they changed to the St. P., M. & W., should be his first intimation of her approach.

If there was anything in what Will Hayward had written May Allison about Stafford and "the Girl from Nowhere," Grace wished to discover the matter fully at the start. The New York girl was bold in her determination to fight, if need be, for him whom she considered her own possession.

She had no idea of allowing Harvey Stafford

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to get away from her. Grace Lemoyne was not of the predatory type of woman, but she was not too meek to demand and obtain by some means all that she considered her own.

She was ready to break a lance with any maid-at-arms for the favor of Harvey Stafford. And in her mother she had indeed a faithful squire. Mrs. Lemoyne said but little on the subject of the millionaire's backwoods inamorata. She thought much, however. She harked back to her own youth and remembered how she had kindled a spark in the breast of the blasé Lorraine Lemoyne which finally became as a consuming fire. Could this strange woods girl—this Gypsy—possess the powers she had once wielded? If so, the mother realized that Grace had a tremendous task before her. Mrs. Lemoyne, at least, did not belittle the possible power of the girl of the tall timber.

They had entered the train for Tall Timber Junction soon after leaving the Overland, in the dining car of which they had breakfasted. Although this was one of the best trains over the St. P., M. & W., the schedule was such that they could not reach their destination until mid-afternoon, and there was no dining car attached. The New York ladies did not look forward to any great amount of comfort on the up train.

But before it had gone far Grace found a subject of interest, and one that quite surprised her. She had the brakeman swing her chair around so

that she could face her mother and see the flying objects after the train had passed them; and there, across the aisle and not many chairs to the rear, was the timberman who had so excited and interested Grace Lemoyne at Union Square.

"Goodness, mother! there is that perfectly wonderful man," she gasped under her breath.

"Who?" Mrs. Lemoyne turned to follow her daughter's gaze, and with almost a groan.

"I told you about him. The man who lifted our car. That wonderful man from Tall Timber. He has something to do with Harvey's business out here."

"Mercy! Do you mean that half-breed Indian?" demanded the older woman, classifying John Longfoot instantly, as Stafford had classified him.

"Sh! Don't offend him! I want to talk to him."

"I wouldn't," objected her mother. "He is nothing but an ignorant backwoodsman."

"You are as bad as Harvey," Grace said. "And then he goes and becomes interested in a backwoods girl!"

"Well, you must not expect me to become very deeply interested in such a person as that. I have seen too many of his like. The woods are full of them."

"Not of such magnificent specimens, I am sure."

"Oh, well! Physically, do you mean? Perhaps not. But men like him are only animals."

John Longfoot sat next to a young man who wore

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shell-bowed spectacles and a light summer suit, and who had the air of a college undergraduate. The contrast between this young fellow and the woodsman was startling. Grace did not know whether the two were acquainted or not; they were not talking at the moment. She was not at all timid about addressing the timberman.

"I presume you do not remember me, Mr. Longfoot," she said, sinking gracefully into an empty chair across the aisle from him.

His eyes narrowed for a moment. Then he remembered the girl in purple—the girl from the limousine. She smiled at him most companionably.

"In New York, you know. You perfectly wonderful man! How could you have lifted that machine? I had no idea a human being could exert such strength."

"Did the boy die?" asked John Longfoot abruptly.

"The boy?" Frankly she was puzzled. Then she realized what he meant. "Oh! you mean that gamin who caused all the trouble."

"I mean the child that was crushed," John Longfoot said sternly.

"Really, I never heard," said Grace carelessly. "The police attend to all such things, you know. It was quite his own fault."

"The police?" repeated Longfoot. "Didn't they tend to you, too?"

She flushed. Did this rude person consider her a subject for police interference? Her mother had been quite right about him. But the man's countenance was so unmoved that she thought he must be merely awkwardly trying to make conversation.

"You are unfamiliar with the city, Mr. Longfoot," she said, laughing low and sweetly. "The boy was entirely at fault. They doubtless did all that could be done for him at the hospital. But you were wonderful in lifting my car."

"But the boy——"

Her flush deepened. Really, she could not imagine why she should so mind what this woodsman said, or thought. It was preposterous.

"You do not understand," she repeated, her eyes flashing. "That sort of person is so common——"

"Hurt people? That crushed child?" and his meaning could not be mistaken now. He actually had the effrontery to criticise her in connection with that unavoidable accident!

"Mr. Longfoot," she said, and her tone was one of stinging rebuke, "there are proper persons to take care of such cases and proper places to put them in. You have no conception of the matter. If you see an animal lying dead in the woods, do you not pass it by?"

"Not if it is wounded," he said sternly. "I put it out of its misery."

"Perhaps your idea is inspired," she said scorn-



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fully. "But the law forbids our killing such creatures in the city."

Her anger had now risen so high that Grace cared little what she said. Her eyes fairly blazed into the countenance of the woodsman, whose own eyes were only hard and black.

"When I go through the timber and see a mother bobcat killed, or have to kill one, I search out the nest and kill the kittens, too, so they shan't starve to death," he said. "I'd feel, if I had run down a child, whether he was at fault or not, that he and his folks should have as much consideration at least as a family of wood-pussies."

"You have quite a moral standard of your own, Mr. Longfoot, haven't you?"

"That is the standard of the tall timber, Miss," he said quietly.

"We cannot all see things from the same angle—especially in ethics," Grace observed, recovering a semblance of good temper, for she had not as yet obtained what she desired of him. Then: "This is a very small world after all, isn't it? It was after our quite wonderful meeting that I learned from Mr. Stafford who you were, Mr. Longfoot."

"H. Harvey Stafford?" repeated the timberman.

"Yes."

"He told you who I was?"

"He said you were from Tall Timber. We are going there now—my mother and I."

Longfoot flashed the older woman up the aisle a single comprehensive glance.

"You are going there to see Stafford?"

"Why—yes. He is there still, is he not?"

"I think so, Miss."

"Have you seen much of him while he has been in the woods?"

"Not much, Miss."

"Oh! Did he not have some business with you?"

"None at all, Miss."

"My name is Lemoyne."

"Miss Lemoyne," he repeated.

"But I understood you came to New York to see Mr. Stafford."

"I did. But not on business of my own. It was about Si Patterson's property. He's dead. We were trying to straighten things out for Si's daughter."

"Oh! And she——?"

"Gypsy Patterson is her name," Longfoot said brusquely. "There are claims against the American Consolidated Timber Corporation that Si willed to Gypsy. Stafford may be here to straighten matters out. I couldn't tell you."

"A timberman's daughter, indeed? 'Gypsy,' did you say her name was?"

"That is what Si called her," he said, still rather stiffly. "You see, she was so wild and dark, and all."

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the bespectacled young man beside him. At least, the wearer of the shell-rimmed glasses laughed.

Her conversation with John Longfoot had not at all eased Grace Lemoyne's mind. She became even more nervous as the train approached Tall Timber.

This emotion, however, was hidden save to the eyes of the keenest observer. Even her mother wondered at Grace's calm.

"I don't know what girls nowadays are made of," Mrs. Lemoyne remarked. "If I were going to meet the man I expected to marry, and believed, as you must, that he had got out of hand and a designing minx was trying her best to get him away from me, I certainly would be flustered."

"And what good would that do me, if it were so?" Grace asked.

"Well!"

"If I am going to regain my influence with Harvey Stafford I know well enough I cannot do it by weeping and wailing. A man like Harvey does not return to a girl because of pity. Indeed, I doubt if Harvey has much of that ingredient in his make-up."

"I'd like to know what you expect to do to win him over!" exclaimed her mother, in exasperation.

"Maybe I will tell you—after I have seen the other girl," said Grace.

But even she did not suspect the dramatic meet-

ing which was in store for her. The train wound slowly into the Tall Timber station an hour late, and they got out upon the barren platform in a westerling sun. So few were the strangers who ever alighted here that not an expectant idler was at the station.

However, before the train had come to a halt, Grace saw a pair of horseback riders cantering toward the station from out of a trail to the south. The girl's figure she did not note in detail, but Grace knew the man for Stafford at first glance.

He had discarded some of his city-made clothing and was dressed more as a Westerner would dress for a ride. He sat his mount superbly—he had always been a good horseman—and never had Grace seen his face so animated nor his carriage more erect.

The lines, too, which concentration upon business and certain dissipations had etched upon his face were, she saw as he rode closer, gone entirely. His month at Tall Timber had improved Harvey Stafford greatly.

He did not see Mrs. Lemoyne or her daughter. The station master, unable to deliver the telegram Grace had sent when Stafford had passed through the town with Gypsy, had sent it over to the hotel. And Stafford did not go there now.

Indeed, he seemed to have eyes for nobody and nothing but the girl astride the brown pony. And

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when Grace was once off the train and had swept Stafford with a single all-comprehending glance, it was Gypsy that she, too, looked at.

She was well worth the scrutiny! The city girl's shocked mind admitted it. This was nothing like the person she had expected the Girl from Nowhere to be. It was not merely that Gypsy Patterson possessed physical charm; it had not been entirely the superabundant enthusiasm of Will Hayward, the cub engineer, that had led him to write with such fervor about this girl of the tall timber; she was indeed a beauty. She rode the brown pony as well as Harvey Stafford did the bay gelding. She was a figure to attract admiration anywhere. Small, but very complete, was Gypsy in every particular. There was nothing awkward about her despite her backwoods up-bringing. The picture of her in the saddle—both of face and figure—was compelling.

The flapping brim of the soft hat she wore had been pinned to the crown by the wind of that last gallop to the railway station. She was laughing, and her dark cheeks held the flame of health and excitement.

Her black hair was netted closely. The ribbon that held it and her tie were in brilliant and colorful contrast to both hair and skin. Her firm, yet dimpled wrists, held reins and crop perfectly. Her

bosom rose and fell without palpitation but under the propulsion of full, calm breathing.

Longfoot had slipped out at the rear of the car. Gypsy, no more than Grace, saw the timberman leave the train. And when the train pulled out after its momentary stop, Stafford and the girl of Tall Timber let their horses out again and galloped through the town toward the north.

Grace turned to her mother. The older woman's face blazed.

"If that's the girl they call Gypsy," Mrs. Lemoyne hissed, "you've got your work cut out for you, Grace!"

## CHAPTER XXI

### GYPSY HAS TROUBLE

It had been a delightful day for both Harvey Stafford and Gypsy. As never before the city man had gained an intimate understanding of the heart and character of the merry yet thoughtful girl of Paradise Knoll.

To Gypsy's mind Stafford was always entertaining. If she had thought at first he must be watched and kept at a distance, she had now put that suspicion aside. She trusted him just as she would any of her friends—the old timbermen in Break-away, other woodsmen whom she knew, even as she trusted John Longfoot!

When they had raced their horses for the railroad station at the Junction in competition with the train on which, all unknown to either, John Longfoot and the Lemoynes had arrived at Tall Timber, for the time being a serious situation had been staved off.

It had never entered Gypsy's mind before, in all their intimacy, that Harvey Stafford would consider marrying a girl such as she was. Gypsy recognized their differences. Stafford had wealth, a position in the outside world, and education—

all that the woodland girl considered desirable. But she had not dreamed of him as a real suitor.

He was the most powerful man, bar none, in Tall Timber. His word was law to a hundred crews of swampers, although they might never have seen him. At a lift of his hand activity would cease in dozens of sawmills and the employees thereof be thrown out of work. She had not chanced to hear how this man's power had been balked in the matter of Gil Martin's drive and by the woodsman!

She had never thought much of the power of wealth until John Longfoot had declared she would be wealthy. Si Patterson had often said: "Well, when Henry Stafford's timber corporation squares up with us, we'll be rich, gal! We'll be rich!"

But that had always seemed to her but the vaporings of the old man. She had not really believed it.

After the Uncles-all and John Longfoot had gone through Uncle Si's papers and found the list of his timber claims, if not the deeds to them, John had declared that there were hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of timber coming to her. It seemed wonderful!

Now she was beginning to dream and to imagine what it would really mean to be rich. To go to Europe—all over the world, indeed! To dress as richly as any girl she had ever seen!



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Yet her thoughts always returned at the end of these flights of fancy to Paradise Knoll and the lodge Si Patterson had built there. Other places would be nice to see; but to live in——

"Well," Gypsy Patterson thought, "one can always come back to Paradise."

Therefore the girl had quite accustomed herself to think of wealth in the abstract; she was to have much money—in the future. But this future that was coming to her could not be compared to the wealth and to the power that Harvey Stafford swayed. If for no other reason, this comparison would have precluded Gypsy's allowing herself to believe for a moment that the president of the A.C.T.C. desired anything more of her than her comradeship while he rusticated in Tall Timber.

She was merry, gay and comradely; but so she almost always was, and with everybody. When she pulled in the brown mare to speak a moment to Steve M'Graw after they left the Junction behind them on this afternoon, she smiled down at the big woodsman quite as charmingly as she had smiled at Harvey Stafford. But there was no coquetry in her smile.

"Howdy, Miss Gypsy. Howdy, sir," was M'Graw's greeting. "Have they moved the Junction much farther south? I've been tramping it clear from Blainesburg, and it does seem as though somebody must have pushed the Junction a fur ways off."

"It was stationary when we left, Steve," laughed Gypsy.

The woodsman was looking up at her curiously. He asked:

"I don't suppose you wear it common, do you, Miss Gypsy? But I expected to see it sparklin' there at your throat."

"What is that?" she asked wonderingly, and putting one gloved hand to the opening of her blouse. "What do you mean—sparkling?"

"Your locket, I mean."

"My locket?"

"That there jewelry I sent to Chicago for when the boss was laid up. You know—sort of a birthday gift it was for you." When he saw the puzzled expression dawn in her face his own went blank. "By the Great King Spruce!" he muttered. "Now I have put my foot in it, by gosh!"

"Tell me what you mean, Steve," commanded Gypsy. "Why should *you* buy jewelry for me?"

"It was for the boss I bought it," Big Steve said stammeringly. "Now, you see, he couldn't get to the express office. I—I—guess I have got my foot in it, no two ways about it. Both feet, by gosh!"

"You bought something for John Longfoot to give to me?" said Gypsy clearly.

"Yes, ma'am. A locket. But for the love of Moses, don't tell him I give it away," sputtered the woodsman. "I never do open my mouth without puttin' my foot in it," he added contritely.

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"I haven't seen John for several days, Steve," said Gypsy gently. "More than a week in fact. And he is away on some business just now. But I will say nothing to him about the locket—or what you have said about it—when he does come to see me."

She touched her pony with the whip and rode on with Stafford. The latter had heard all, and for once he was unable to mask his real feelings. But Gypsy did not note his black look, although she understood after a bit that his mood had changed.

The tenderness that had overcome him as they rode back from Mitt Mountain to the Junction and which had urged an expression of his affection for the woods girl, was crowded down now by a jealous hatred of John Longfoot. He could never even hear the half-breed's name without feeling a consuming flame of hatred for him in his heart. He had not failed to learn whose keen mind it was that had beaten him in the affair of the Gil Martin drive.

He knew well enough that his first evil suspicion of the association of Gypsy and Longfoot was entirely groundless. Yet he hated the timberman.

The very fact that he secretly considered the timberman worthy of his steel in this battle for the girl of Tall Timber was a cause of deep chagrin to H. Harvey Stafford.

He could put aside without compunction Gypsy's

lack of social prestige and her faults of education. That she was practically a nameless waif and had been brought up in a distinctly different social world from his own, was likewise a thought that no longer troubled his mind.

But the fact that John Longfoot was her friend—that she considered the timberman such, no matter if she seldom spoke his name—roused all the evil in Stafford's nature. The primal passion of hate took hold of him at thought of John Longfoot—and such passion as had never shaken him in his life before!

Gypsy need not be on her guard now against that declaration which she realized was near his lips half an hour previously. Stafford's mind, as well as her own, was turned from such thoughts. They rode to the clearing of the three old timbermen with scarcely a word. Nor could Stafford be urged to go on to Paradise for supper; and he refused the hospitality of Sam Killock quite brusquely.

"What's shot him all full of holes?" demanded the cockatoo man.

"I guess something's crossed him," Stetter wheezed.

"What have you been sayin' to him, Gypsy?" demanded Crane shrewdly. "He looks like a man hard hit."

"Why, what nonsense you talk, Uncles-all!" cried the girl. "There is nothing the matter with Mr.

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Stafford. We have had a very wonderful day."

"An' you don't look none too happy yourself, Gypsy," said Crane, still staring at her.

"He didn't say nothin' about them timber claims to you, did he, gal?" inquired Stetter.

"No, no! Mr. Stafford and I never talk business. But I want to know what has become of John Longfoot. Have you seen him?"

"Not for a week or more," replied Killock.

"Ain't he to home?" Crane demanded.

"He ain't been over here but once since he got his leg smashed," Stetter observed.

"Well, he hasn't been up to Paradise at all, and Bobolink tells me he has gone away. I think he must have gone by train. But where to—and what for?"

"Ain't got the first idea," Killock told her, shaking his head.

"It is nothing about my—my affairs, is it, Uncles-all?"

"John ain't got nothin' to do with your business, Gypsy," declared Neb Crane decidedly.

"Have you talked further with Mr. Stafford about the claims?" she asked with continued hesitation.

"It's up to him to say the first word," declared Killock.

"But doesn't John say anything regarding a settlement of my affairs, Uncles-all? You know, I am getting anxious——"

"We ain't askin' John's advice," wheezed Stetter, getting red in the face.

"But you did ask him," the girl said wonderingly.

"That was a long time back," Killock replied.

"It wouldn't be noways wise for us to drag John into your business now—not if we expect to settle with Mr. Stafford's corporation without a fight."

"Why?" she demanded sharply.

"Well, 'cause," gruffly replied the cockatoo man, his topknot bristling.

"Have you Uncles-all quarreled with John Long-foot?" demanded the girl, in amazement.

"Quarrel? We don't never quarrel with nobody," wheezed Stetter.

"Course not," said Crane. "We're as peaceable as though we wasn't weaned yet."

"You said a true word," declared Killock with perfect gravity.

"Then what is the matter with you and John?" insisted the girl.

"Nothin'. Nothin' at all," said Crane, shaking his head with vigor.

"Course we wouldn't have no words with Johnny," Stetter hastened to add.

But Gypsy shook her head.

"I see we'll haf to tell you," Sam Killock finally said, in disgust. "You always was the perseverin'est young one that ever lived! We ain't askin' John to no conference over your affairs, because

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Mr. Stafford pointedly said he didn't want him buttin' in."

"Who? John?"

"Stafford asked who he was goin' to settle this business with when the time came to settle, and we told him we three was all the executors there was of Si Patterson's estate," continued Killock. "It seems John must have rubbed his hair the wrong way when he was in New York that time, and Stafford pointedly said he wouldn't have no dealin's with John. So——"

"But you would not agree to any settlement that John did not approve of, would you?" the girl demanded.

"Hi! Yi! Why not?" cried Neb Crane. "What d'you think?—that we're in our second childhood?"

"Ain't no law to make us ask Johnny what shall we do, is there?" wheezed Stetter scornfully.

"You said yourself for us not to quarrel with Stafford," added Sam Killock.

"Has that anything to do with your scorning John's advice when it comes to the settlement of Uncle Si's claims? Why, John knows more than anybody else about the timber and its value and the boundaries of Uncle Si's timberlands. You all said so once."

"Well——" grumbled Crane.

"We've got to do our best for you, Gypsy,"

wheezed Stetter. "And there ain't no use of-fendin' Mr. Stafford."

"Stafford seems like a pretty good feller," Killock remarked.

"I like Mr. Stafford, too," agreed the girl. "But I don't like him so much that I must offend an old friend like John. When it comes to business, Uncles-all, Mr. Stafford is not to be considered in a friendly light, is he? Business is business! You see, Mr. Stafford has the interests of his associates in the corporation to look out for, as well as his own. We must look out for ourselves."

"Well, dern it all!" ejaculated Killock. "Ain't we goin' to look out for you, Gypsy?"

"I expect you will do the best you can for me, Uncles-all," the girl said slowly. "But I am sorry—oh, very, very sorry—that you have put John out of your confidence." And gathering up the reins she started the brown pony up the path to Paradise.



## CHAPTER XXII

### HE DOES NOT DENY IT

THE big bay, at last headed toward his oats, carried Harvey Stafford Junctionward with lengthening stride. The man's mind, however, set upon fretful thoughts, gave little heed to the horse or his pace. It was of Gypsy Patterson and John Longfoot, Stafford cogitated.

The girl had been his for the day—so close and so precious that all the good in the man had risen to the surface. He had begun to realize now just how pure and wholesome was this new passion that held such sway over him. Unlike his sentiments toward other girls—even what he felt for Grace Lemoyne—this new emotion was unclouded by baser thoughts.

There was, in any case, something in the outdoor life he was leading that bred clean thoughts. He was not the same man who had sat before his desk five weeks before in New York and sneered at John Longfoot, who had come so far for Gypsy's sake.

He knew now that Longfoot's attempt to interest him in the Patterson claims had been fathered in the timberman's mind by his love for Gypsy.

That that love for the girl was as pure as his own sentiment he could not doubt. And many as were the advantages he held over Longfoot as a lover, Stafford was stung now by the evidence that the friendship of "that half-breed" meant much to Gypsy Patterson.

He had read her countenance while Steve had awkwardly divulged John Longfoot's little secret. The gift, no matter how simple it might be, meant much to Gypsy.

The timberman's mention of the locket had centered the girl's thoughts upon Longfoot. It had also muddled the stream of Stafford's emotions at its source.

He was giving all too much time to this girl and to the prosecution of an intent that was altogether cloudy in his mind. He was neglecting the very business on which he had come to Tall Timber. His pursuit of Gypsy Patterson had led his mind entirely astray. He was here upon serious affairs. His money, and his partners' money, was in jeopardy. Not only were the Patterson claims a menace to the American Consolidated Timber Corporation, but a close scrutiny of the real estate transfer records of the County would show that the boundaries of many of the areas of stumpage held by the corporation were in doubt.

He could not go to the county clerk's office and investigate the records himself. That would at-

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tract too much notice. But he had Bob Larrabee about where he wanted the hungry lawyer now. Larrabee was so flattered by the attention Stafford had shown him that he would do almost anything for the president of the A.C.T.C. in hope of further legal crumbs from that table.

No matter what might be the outcome of his affair with Gypsy Patterson, Stafford must protect himself and his friends. This present shock to his emotions awoke him to the necessity of action in the business he had come West upon. His mind was deeply engaged with the problem as he rode into the Junction.

He left his horse at the livery stable and started for the hotel. As he crossed Railroad Avenue he saw the flash of a newly lighted lamp in Larrabee's office. He turned in at the entrance of the building and mounted to the lawyer's room. It was two hours later, and he had missed supper at the Lumberman's Rest, when he came out upon Railroad Avenue again.

The parlor of the hotel was alight, and as Stafford drew near the tinny piano was being strummed by the powerful fingers of Mrs. Guffey's niece, Anabelle Whitman. Anabelle was her aunt's official aid throughout the day; but in the evening she did her best to attract the town gallants to her net. Her bait was a low-cut waist that displayed an enormous expanse of reddened shoulders and

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chest, for Anabelle was of Junoesque build, and an ability to get something like harmony out of the ancient piano.

"A girl must put her best foot forward," Anabelle was wont to say, "or she'll be sure to die an old maid in Tall Timber—no two ways about it!"

To-night she had enmeshed Steve M'Graw, a young man with shell-rimmed glasses who was evidently enjoying himself immensely, and a raw-boned boy from back in the timber somewhere who had come to the Junction to sell a yoke of steers. Anabelle was in such practice that she could play and sing "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean" and flirt with all three of the young men at the same time.

Stafford grinned to himself as he started up the steps of the hotel porch. All was fish that came into Anabelle's net—or anywhere near her fishing grounds—and she had not refrained from attempting the subjugation of the city man, as well as the backwoods swains.

Stafford's mood had changed. He had come away from the conclave with Larrabee in a much more cheerful frame of mind. He might have joined the party in the parlor; but a low, composed, and well remembered, yet startling voice reached his ear.

"Harvey! You would pass us right by—I do say! Do you see him, mother?"

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Stafford wheeled. The last person he would ever have expected or wanted to see here; the very last person!

"Grace!"

"And he sounds as though he had no expectation of seeing us at all," went on Grace Lemoyne's cool voice.

"Good evening, Harvey," the mother said quite as coolly, if more tartly, than the daughter.

"For heaven's sake! why didn't you let me know?"

"I really do not see how we could have got the information to you, as both the mails and the telegraph company seem to have failed," Grace observed, quite dispassionately. "I inquired here at the desk, and found my telegram from St. Paul has been lying here for you since morning. But you were gone early and evidently stay late. As for my letter——"

"I have received letters from you, my dear Grace," Stafford said, shaking hands now with both of the women; "but none in which you even faintly suggested coming to Tall Timber."

"I do not understand that, Harvey," Grace declared. "I remember very clearly giving it to Mapes to mail within the hour of our deciding to come West."

"But why?" he asked, not at all pleasantly. "This is no place for you. There are no accommodations."

"How have you managed to put up with this Lumberman's Rest so long?" interrupted Grace, and actually laughed. "And you, so particular—not to say fussy—Harvey. As for us, well, this Mrs. Guffey seems a good soul. She has given us her best, I am sure."

"But——"

"Grace would do it, Harvey," said Mrs. Lemoyne. "Of course, it is awful. But we could not go right by without stopping to see you."

"We came to St. Paul with the Bishops," explained Grace, with another light laugh. "We really are on our way to the Coast, you know. We've often talked of going, and Cora Bishop begged so—well! we packed between days and started. You don't seem overjoyed to see us, Harvey," she added, watching him closely.

"But I am so unutterably surprised," he said.

"So are we," the girl rejoined drily. "I confess I had no idea it was as bad as the fact seems. Even your letters did not prepare me. That girl in yonder hammering that piano! Are there many like her?"

"Quantities, I fear," and Harvey Stafford was on guard at once.

"The hotel accommodations are so dreadful," murmured Mrs. Lemoyne. "How do you stand it?"

"I'm rather used to it all now. I really have learned to manicure my own nails," he observed lightly.

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"We came this way," said Grace seriously, "because we thought you certainly must have settled your business affairs by this time, and we hoped you would go on to the Coast with us and so home by the Grand Canyon and the Southern Route."

"Well——"

"We are prepared to wait for you a reasonable length of time," put in Mrs. Lemoyne. "But do have pity on us, Harvey."

He was now his cool and calculating self. He could not make out whether the Lemoynes had some ulterior reason in coming to Tall Timber or had stated the conditions that brought them here frankly. In any case he found himself sorry that they had come.

He had no desire to play squire here in Tall Timber to two such dames. This was no place for them in any case. And their presence would interfere with certain of his plans. First of all they would interfere with his association with Gypsy Patterson.

But, now that he was over his first startled vexation, he did not openly show displeasure. He wanted to know:

"Are you sure you have the best Mrs. Guffey can give you? Hadn't I better see her?"

"Don't trouble," Grace said carelessly. "We were recommended to her by one whose influence with the good woman is much greater than your own, I am sure."

"Whom do you mean?" he asked, puzzled.

"We came up on the train with that perfectly wonderful Indian who was in New York that time to see you. You know?"

"That half-breed!"

"John Longfoot. Yes. I mentioned his name to Mrs. Guffey, and, really, she could not do too much for us. She seems to think Mr. Longfoot is quite a wonderful man. Says he is very successful in business, that he is getting rich, and that some of the people here think of running him for the State Legislature."

"That half-breed!" sneered Harvey again.

"He seems to have r'iled you, Harvey. Isn't that the local expression?" and her laugh was quite spontaneous.

"I've no reason to love him," he said shortly.

Mrs. Lemoyne arose. "I am going to bed," she said. "I am completely exhausted after the ride in that—er—cattle train. It was awful, Harvey!"

"The St. P., M. and W. hasn't all the luxuries of the bigger roads," he admitted, rising to take the older woman's hand again. He was quite master of himself now. "I hope you will sleep well."

"At least, the mattress is fair," she replied, as she departed.

"Do you really like it here, Harvey?" Grace asked abruptly.

"It is rather a change, you know. Yes, I have been enjoying myself hugely."



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"But how about this business of the timber claims you said forced you to come out here?"

"It is a serious situation still," he replied rather stiffly.

"Really? I fancied your amusements might have caused you to slight business."

"Business first with me always, you know, Grace," he rejoined carelessly.

"Indeed? The corporation is still in danger of losing money?"

"A great deal of it if things go against us."

"And are things going to go against us?"

"They are not!" he replied confidently.

"Then you must have matters completely in hand?"

"I have my plans completed."

"So you can go West with us—when?"

"I shall have to think about that," he said, again bruskiy.

Grace turned in her chair to confront him. The light from the open parlor window streamed across her face. They could talk in perfect safety because of the din of voices and the piano inside the room. Anabelle was desiring somebody to carry her back to "Ol' Ferginny," in a voice so strident that it might almost have been heard as far away as that Cradle of the Presidents.

The New York girl's perfect features were like a cameo in their present setting. Her charm was

not lost on Harvey Stafford. Now that the momentary vexation he had felt at her surprising appearance was past, he would yield as usual to the influence she always exercised. But these emotions Grace roused within him were not the same chords on which Gypsy Patterson played.

"You have a new interest out here in Tall Timber, Harvey," Grace said, quite calmly.

He started at that. His eyes narrowed and his countenance grew hard. He did not speak.

"We got off the train here," the girl went on, speaking in quite a matter-of-fact way, "just as you and your friend were riding through the town. A bird of rather brilliant plumage, that—isn't she, Harvey? I was curious enough to make inquiries, and I learn that she is the heiress of the old timberman whose estate makes these claims against our corporation. I suppose I am rightly informed?"

"She is Gypsy Patterson—yes," Stafford said, quite on guard again. "Rather an amusing girl."

"Of this brand?" and Grace nodded at Anabelle Whitman. "I did not dream such bucolic beauties would ever interest you, Harvey."

But he would not be chafed into showing emotion of any kind.

"Miss Patterson is not like Anabelle," was all he said.

"I hope you will introduce me."

"I shall be glad to if I have the opportunity."

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"Make the opportunity—do, Harvey! I am curious. There really must be something remarkable about her if you are so much interested."

"There is one thing Gypsy Patterson may have if we are not successful in blocking the attempts of Si's executors," he said drily.

"You mean——?"

"About a third of the A.C.T.C.'s timber holdings," he told her flatly. "I've mentioned already to you, Grace, that your father and mine and the remainder of the old partners were very clumsy at the time of the organization of the corporation. If these fellows who have charge of Gypsy's legacy hired good legal talent——Well, they might easily do us a lot of harm."

"And are you playing cavalier to this—er—Gypsy girl, for business purposes only?"

She could not keep the anger she felt out of her tone. Grace Lemoyne had held her temper much longer and under greater provocation than was usually her way. With even Harvey Stafford she could not restrain longer a revelation of the fact that she was frankly jealous of this girl of Tall Timber.

"It is my business under the conditions I have stated to do all in my power to save the A.C.T.C. from loss," Stafford said flatly. "If I can secure any influence whatsoever over Gypsy Patterson, in the end it may give us the winning hand."

"Don't try to fool yourself, Harvey!" she exclaimed sharply. "Nor can you fool me."

"Your meaning is not clear, my dear girl," he told her, becoming more calm himself as she allowed her increasing wrath to get the better of her judgment.

"You were not thinking of business when you and that backwoods girl sat in your saddles there by the railway station this afternoon."

"Indeed?"

"I saw you!" snapped Grace. "I saw your eyes fixed upon that girl's face. If the salvation of our timber rights depends upon your management of that creature, I am sorry for mother and the other stockholders of the A.C.T.C. You are more likely to wed her than to play any of your sharp business tricks on her!"

"Yes? And perhaps that would the better conserve the timber corporation's interests," Stafford said, as though accepting her suggestion seriously. "But Miss Gypsy might not care to buy into the A.C.T.C. at such a price."

He got up, coolly bowed to her, and went inside. When she had succeeded in composing her face Grace hurried up to her own room. Mrs. Lemoyne called her from next door.

"Well?" said the older woman when Grace appeared in the doorway.

"The man is mad!" came in a gush from her

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daughter, her voice half strangled by sobs. "I can just feel, mother, that Harvey Stafford is completely netted by that creature. I accused him of being willing to marry this uncouth native—this Girl from Nowhere—and he did not deny it!"

## CHAPTER XXIII

### FENCING

HARVEY STAFFORD did not ride to Paradise the following day. And perhaps that was just as well, for Gypsy had run away from him.

There was no small reaction in the heart and mind of the woods girl after the several exciting incidents of this day of Grace Lemoyne's arrival in and John Longfoot's return to Tall Timber. Nor did she, of course, dream of all that had happened potent in the warp and woof of her interests.

That Harvey Stafford, millionaire and powerful business man, had been on the verge of proposing marriage to her she knew right well. Had she been more receptive and encouraging to him she might, this very day, be wearing his ring and treasure in her heart the knowledge that she had been chosen by the president of the American Consolidated Timber Corporation out of all the women he might know to be his wife.

She was not ignorant of the fact that although Stafford had not uttered the words, it was her own fault he had not done so. She could yet give him opportunity to speak if she wished.

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Yet she found no sure inclination in her heart to seek this. Indeed, another incident of that wonderful day held a more important place in her thoughts than the memory of Harvey Stafford's half-proposal.

This was the curiosity she felt about the locket John Longfoot had bought for her—but had not presented. She wondered what it was like—what kind of locket it was—how it would look on its chain hung about her neck. *And why had John not given it to her?*

It was this thought that inspired the feeling that she did not wish to meet Harvey Stafford at once. Fearing he would appear as usual at Paradise, she slipped away before mid-forenoon without telling Aunt Tabby her destination nor how long she would be gone.

She ran down through the maple grove to the river, intending to follow the bank of the stream until she reached the spot opposite John's cabin. Then she suddenly remembered that the canoe would be on the other shore, and she wished to discover if John had returned home without making her anxiety known to Bobolink, the Indian boy.

Her own canoe had been lost the day she had recklessly baited the bobcat on the sand bar, far below; and she had not as yet obtained another craft. There was a place, however, where it might be possible for her to cross the stream and so ap-

proach the cabin in the gully without being observed by either the Indian lad or John, if he had come home.

The level of the Brindle having fallen considerably, she believed she could cross by certain stepping stones—boulders in the stream in an uncertain line from shore to shore, now with most of their crowns out of water.

There was an oak plank she knew of, too, hidden on this side of the river in a thicket. She hunted it out and dragged it down to the water's edge.

Gypsy was agile and strong. She slung the end of the narrow oak plank from rock to rock very skillfully. Sometimes she walked it erect; at other times she crossed on hands and knees, but always quickly and with a confidence that would have amazed the ordinary beholder.

But nobody saw her. She was quite alone. She reached mid-current, where the water was deep and swift. The tops of several of the stones were six inches or more under the surface. She had difficulty in setting the end of the plank securely before venturing to bridge some of the gaps between boulders.

Arriving finally at a larger and more rounding stone than the others, she ventured upon it and then set the plank between it and the next refuge.

She felt the round boulder quiver. Had it been



underwashed by the stream and was it about to plunge from its old site to a new one?

Gypsy, quivering and breathless, but feeling that she must go on, crept out upon the plank. The boulder behind her rocked again. She sprang forward. She reached the next rock, landing well upon it.

But the stone she had left rolled completely over and almost disappeared in a deep pool. It was out of her reach. She could not return to it if she so desired.

Worst of all, the plank had fallen into the stream and was floating rapidly away. Gypsy turned to look for the next stepping stone. It was too far away for her to leap to it, and the water was deep between. The loss of the plank was tragic.

She was hopelessly cast away here, it would seem, in the middle of the river. The channel on either side of her refuge, and both above and below, was deep, and the current ran strongly. Brindle River at this point, at least, offered no encouragement to the swimmer.

Nor did Gypsy desire to breast the current. She was in a most ridiculous, if not a perilous situation. To discard her clothing—or most of it—and plunge into the stream did not seem at all a pleasant venture.

She might have shouted until she was voiceless. Paradise Lodge was the nearest dwelling, and that was two good miles away. John Longfoot's cabin

was farther still; and there might be nobody there, not even Bobolink.

Yet there was the possibility of somebody coming into sight at almost any moment. Some stranger, perhaps; or a woodsman whom she knew. In either case, to disrobe and be caught in midstream in that plight was not a thing to be desired.

Nevertheless, something had to be done. Gypsy was not the girl to sit helpless and wailing without putting forth every effort possible for her own salvation.

She plumped down on the rock and stripped off her laced boots and her stockings. Then she stood upright once more and looked all about. Should she venture? Did she dare?

She unknotted the scarf at the collar of her blouse and removed it. She unbuttoned the blouse and then removed her belt and slipped out of the blouse. She wore an armless vest beneath, which revealed perfectly her swelling bosom and the lissomeness of her body.

Flashing a glance from shore to shore she unhooked the placket of her skirt. It dropped to the dry rock. She stood revealed in the undervest and rather tight bloomers. Had Harvey Stafford seen her then he might indeed have declared her a water sprite.

Making her discarded clothing into a compact bundle, which she made fast with the belt, and by which she carried it, Gypsy stepped carefully into

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the water. There was a lower ledge of the rock on which she had been so unfortunately cast away; the water flowed over this, almost knee-deep.

She stood poised a moment, sharply peering for the more shallow places in mid-stream. If she was forced to swim her bundle of clothing would get wet. The current was so boisterous that she might lose the bundle altogether, or be swept downstream herself.

Gypsy was not afraid of being drowned. But she gave a thought to her appearance if forced to go home to Paradise without her outer garments.

She ventured one step into the current. The water was cold and it tugged at her legs as though determined to drag her off her feet. She wavered there, striding from ledge to shallow sandbar, her limbs gleaming, her body freckled by the shaking shadows of the leafy screen above the river.

And at this moment—as she was thus poised—there came a hail from downstream. A voice carrying well above the ripple and dash of the water cried:

“Hoo-hoo! Hold hard! I’m coming, Gypsy!”

“Goodness me! It’s John!” gasped the girl.

She was just as startled and as shy as any other modest girl would be under similar circumstances. And yet—it was only John! John would not mind! He would understand! She would never catch in John Longfoot’s eyes the expression that she had seen barely veiled in Harvey Stafford’s.

She turned a laughing, if blushing, face to her coming rescuer. Longfoot sat well back in his canoe, the bow of which, despite considerable duffle forward, was well out of the water. His quick, strong paddle-stroke drove the canoe toward the spot where Gypsy stood, in spite of eddy and current.

"Wait a bit!" he called again.

"I am waiting, John," she responded. "In fact, I've just got to wait, I guess."

In a brief space he brought the canoe directly over the ledge on which she still had one foot placed. All she need do was to drop her bundle into the bottom of the craft and then step gingerly in herself.

"You child, you!" exclaimed Longfoot, guiding the canoe on to deeper and stiller water. "What were you doing out here in the middle of the river?"

"I am not a child, John. And I was coming to see you."

"You were?"

"Yes. As you did not come to see me. Although I know you have been rushing all about the country since I saw you last. And I was down at the cabin, too."

"Business," said the timberman. "But is that the way to cross the river?"

"It's low enough. I've been across on those stepping stones before," she pouted.

"The water is low all right. Lower than I like

to see it at this season," Longfoot said. "I hear the swamp outlets above Blainesburg are stoppered tight as a bottle. Some of those Swede bosses who worked crews up there last season left the streams full of filth. If a big rain comes by and by—whew! we'll have a whale of a flood, Gypsy."

He spoke in a matter-of-fact way. His eyes, when not fixed on the stream ahead, sought the girl's face only. She could not dress here in the canoe, for the danger of overturning it was too great. She undid her bundle and spread her skirt across her legs and slipped into her blouse and buttoned it. The flush went out of her countenance and she became her usual smiling, merry self. This was only John!

"Where did you go, John?" she asked. "Bobolink intimated that you had gone far and would stay long."

"That's all he knew about it," Longfoot rejoined.

"And that is all I know about it," she said. "Aren't you going to tell me?"

"I went to St. Paul. On business," he said briefly. "Timber business."

"About next season's work?"

"Well—yes. Partly."

"But, John! aren't you going to cut for me next winter?" she asked. "You know we talked about it. The Uncles-all said they were willing to let you take hold. I'll be of age right in the middle of the logging season."

"Yes. I know. I hope to take that contract," said Longfoot soberly. "But it's a little early yet——"

"Why! you were sure you'd do it, months ago," she cried.

"But, Gypsy, that was before Stafford came out here."

"What has that to do with it, John?" she demanded, watching him keenly.

He shook his head slowly. "I am afraid I could not work with Stafford—nor under him—even if I were allowed to," he said.

"You do not trust Harvey Stafford!" she flashed at him.

"No, I do not."

"You have taken a dislike to him," she went on, accusingly. She was on the verge of saying: "You are jealous, John!" But she did not say it.

"I admit I did not fall in love with Stafford when I met him in New York," Longfoot said drily. "And I doubt if it has materially changed him to come to Tall Timber."

"I do not think you are fair, John," Gypsy said. "He—he seems very nice to me." Longfoot was silent. "At any rate, what has that to do with your sticking to your plan to cut my timber?"

"A good deal. The old men think they can make a good settlement with the A.C.T.C. through Stafford. If they do—for all your timber claims—then Stafford will cut over your lands, not me."

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"Oh, John!"

"There is plenty of other timber for me, Gypsy," he said smiling. "I've got several pieces in my eye already."

"But suppose the Uncles-all can't settle with the A.C.T.C.?"

"Then we shall have to get at it from another angle. I always stand ready to help you, Gypsy."

"Do you, John?" she repeated wistfully.

"You know it," he declared, and smiled one of his rare smiles, with the corners of his eyes crinkling and their brown depths like a pool under the river-bank. "Whether all the business is settled before the old men hand the reins of government over to you or not, I'm your friend, Gypsy."

"And nothing will ever change things between us, John?"

"Not really. Not away down deep in our hearts, I am sure, Gypsy," he said, the smile fading from his lips but a light that she had always loved to see lingering in his eyes.

"We have been the best of friends ever since you first came to Paradise. Remember? I was doing chores for Si then—a kid, nine or ten years old. I lived with my Grandmother Petrie down there in the cabin in the gash. She owned that patch of timber to the south of it, you know. Cutting that when I was sixteen gave me my start.

"And you were always good to me, Gypsy. You never called me a half-breed."

"Oh, John!"

"It was against me some—my Indian blood. I've kind of lived it down, as you might say," with a whimsical smile. "But you never held it against me as some did."

"I should say not!" cried the girl quickly.

"Now I've got above it. I don't notice if I hear it any more. Folks here in Tall Timber know what I can do, and that when I say a thing I mean it. There isn't a white man in all these woods that I can't equal in white folks' ways; and my being part red gives me an advantage rather than a handicap. I'm keener on the scent, I know woodlore almost by instinct, and I can keep my mind to myself the way a white man can't. Usually a white man has to talk—plumb has to! It's a disadvantage not to be able to keep one's mouth closed."

"I know just how tongue-tied you can be, John," said the girl, shaking her head. "Sometimes it makes me wonder if, after all, you consider me truly your friend."

"Of course I do," he said stoutly.

"But not close enough to confide in me any more."

"Do you confide everything to me, Gypsy?" She flushed deeply again and her eyes sought to read his face. "Of course you don't. It wouldn't be expected that you should. You're a girl and I'm a man."



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"There is no sex in friendship—or, there shouldn't be, John," she said with gravity.

"That may be book-philosophy; but it don't gibe in real life. A girl and a man can meet on common ground just so far. Then one finds out she's a woman and the other finds out he's a man."

"Why—John!" and she twinkled all over her face, "you haven't found out you are a woman, I am sure?"

"No. But I have discovered you are, Gypsy—a woman grown. And I guess other folks know it too," he added significantly. "The men you know are beginning to look at you with other eyes than they used when you were a kiddie running wild about Paradise. Don't you know that?"

"I don't want them to treat me differently, or—or look at me so, John. You don't, John."

He flashed her a single searching glance that brought the blood again to all her countenance—even to her throat and her forehead—in a flood of crimson.

"I might look at you so, Gypsy," he said softly. "But would it be wise? You are very kind to me, but you are no longer my little playmate. You are a woman grown," he repeated.

"And I know so little, after all!" she sighed, but she watched him with her head on one side like a bird on a twig.

"Huh!" he jerked out, dipping deep with the paddle. "You know all that Mother Eve ever knew."

He laughed after that with less grimness, and added: "You're really a wonderful girl, Gypsy. There's nobody like you in the tall timber."

"Do you really think that, John?"

"I know it!" he declared vigorously. "And I didn't see anybody in New York who was a patch to you."

"Not even the girl you told me about—the girl in Mr. Stafford's office?" she asked gleefully.

"She was a wonderful dresser!" he admitted.

"You let me ashore here, John, so that I can dress," she cried. "I believe you are poking fun at me."

"Never!" And he turned the prow of the canoe toward the bank.

In a quiet pool under the drooping limbs of a great tree she caught a branch with one hand and then pitched her possessions out upon the shore.

"Will you be gone long, John?" she asked, hesitating now.

"I don't expect to be."

She did not look at him. She arose and stepped out upon the shore. Her slim, but perfectly rounded limbs, her lithe, supple body, shone like a jewel in the brown light under the bank. Now John feasted his eyes upon her, and those eyes were still brown and warm.

"Is that all you have to say to me, John?" Gypsy asked wistfully.

"Guess I've told you all the news," he said, turn-

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ing his head quickly and dipping his paddle in the stream to keep the canoe from backing.

"And—and—you have nothing to *give* me, John?"

"Why—I guess not, Gypsy," he replied, frankly puzzled.

She had scrambled together her garments. She stood a moment clutching them before her and looking down into his face.

"Good-bye, John," she said, and then, in a flash, like the nymph of the wood she was, Gypsy was lost to sight in the thicket.

Longfoot plunged his paddle deep in the stream again and shot the canoe away from the bank. That Gypsy's bright eyes should watch his swinging figure as he paddled so swiftly out of sight was not strange, although unsuspected by the man. John Longfoot was a splendid specimen of manhood.

He could not believe, indeed, that her interest in him was so keen. After what he had seen that day at Paradise when he had dropped the locket, John could not think of Gypsy Patterson as the same close friend and comrade she had once been to him.

Stafford had come between them. The Eastern man filled the character of the villain in the piece to perfection!

John Longfoot could think of Stafford in no other way—see him in no other light. He had descried none of the admirable qualities in the New

York man that he knew Gypsy believed Stafford possessed.

These thoughts welled up from John Longfoot's heart and left their bitter taste upon his lips. He did not wish to contemplate the success of his rival for Gypsy's affections, even in the abstract.

Several miles upstream he gave up the silent battle against these searing thoughts and drove his canoe with sudden vigor into a pool under a sheltering bank.

He threw the loop of his tumpline over a limb with which to fasten the canoe. Then from his duffle he drew forth the case which contained the fiddle which he never cared long to be without.

He tightened the bow. He tuned the strings. He tucked the fiddle under his chin and, lying back against the bags amidships, began to play.

His first notes were broken and as forlorn as were his secret thoughts. But gradually his heart warmed to the music. If the gravity did not altogether lift from his face, the bow drew from the taut strings a more cheerful air.

There was consolation for even his sore heart in the inspiration of the harmony. The notes called into being drew his thoughts upward. A lighter mood entered into his soul.

The old French lullaby he finally played over and over again—one he remembered as having been sung to him by his Grandmother Petrie—did not

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cause John Longfoot to forget his trouble, but it soothed his heartache and brought the peace that he desired.

The more sanguine side of his nature took command again. He had not won his great desire, it was true; but neither had he wholly failed. While life and youth remained, there was hope.

The warm brown eyes glowed again. His lips puckered to the lilting tune. Again he was the John Longfoot of old—the John Longfoot that refused to acknowledge himself beaten in any one thing to which he had once put his hand.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### TEN DOLLARS FOR ONE

HARVEY STAFFORD could not escape his social duties. He felt that he had Grace and Mrs. Lemoyne on his hands and that he must show them all the courtesy that would be expected of him in some more "civilized" place.

That he had sought to throw aside the hampers of his social existence at home while he was here in Tall Timber would not excuse any neglect of the two women or gloss over a lack of care for their comfort. They would expect him, of course, to make their stay at the backwoods town as pleasant as possible.

Harvey Stafford had heard from his father that Mrs. Lemoyne had been born and lived her girlhood in just such an environment as this. Because of the fact he expected her to be the more difficult of the two to please. Mrs. Lemoyne had come to Tall Timber Junction under protest. Any reminder of her upbringing was by no means pleasing to her.

As the Lemoynes had brought no maid, Stafford sought out Anabelle Whitman before going to bed

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that night and bribed her with more money than she ever saw of her own in three months to give her full attention to the ladies from New York.

"Sure! I'll do it for you, Mr. Stafford," Anabelle said, preening and eying the city man aslant. "I expect she's your girl, ain't she?"

"Oh, no!" Stafford replied, with a perfectly serious countenance. "Mrs. Lemoyne is the widow of Loraine Lemoyne who was my father's partner. Don't you think she is a bit old for me?"

"Mr. Smarty!" giggled Anabelle, rapping him sharply with the fan that was fastened to her belt by a blue ribbon. "You know who I mean, all righty!"

But Anabelle gave her time to the visitors from New York the next morning. She helped them about their baths. She helped them dress. And she ushered them finally to the breakfast table where Harvey Stafford, in immaculate morning dress and with a flower in his buttonhole, awaited them.

"Don't he look just too sweet for anything?" confided Anabelle, in a whisper, to Grace.

"I see he has touched your heart," said the New York girl, laughing.

"Sure! He's got every girl in Tall Timber going."

"Indeed? I had no idea he would be so popular here. I fancied that Mr. Longfoot would be more approved by the girls."

"John Longfoot? He is some fellow! He'd be

all right to marry—if a girl could get him. John's smart, and he's makin' money. But for a real pretty man—just to make a fuss over—give me your young man yonder, Miss. I ain't one of them that blames Aunt Elvira for keepin' Marmaduke Guffey dressed up so fine. It's a pleasure to have a pretty man around."

This lost nothing in being repeated by Grace, for she knew it would anger Stafford. He had perfect control of himself on this morning, however; and nothing she could say would tempt him to show chagrin. He was prepared to ride all about Tall Timber with them, to show them the "beauty spots." Two of the corporation's mills were near, and he would take them to these factories. He had already arranged with Bill Brock for good mounts for the visitors.

"To jounce over these wood roads! Well!" groaned Mrs. Lemoyne.

"How nice of you, Harvey!" gushed Grace. "I'm crazy to see the wild places—and the wild people—of Tall Timber."

"You certainly are crazy when you express such desires," sighed her mother. "But I suppose I must go along."

"Of course, Mamma. You will have to chaperone us. What would our friends say if they heard that I rode all over Tall Timber with Harvey alone? Not to be thought of!"

Thus she sank the arrows of her spite in Stafford.



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Never for an hour did she allow him to forget the girl he had been riding about Tall Timber with, and without thought of Mrs. Grundy. Without mentioning Gypsy Patterson, Grace was continually referring to her—intimating, insinuating, grossly misrepresenting. She certainly set Harvey Stafford's teeth on edge.

"Really, Harvey," she said on one occasion, "that Anabelle Whitman is a perfect scream. But I suppose she is typical of Tall Timber. She is a character, if ever there was one. And the gossip she relates!"

"Anabelle is what Mrs. Guffey calls a 'fluid talker'," he admitted.

"Yes, indeed. And she knows everybody in all this wide country, I think. She is very intimate with a girl who lives back in the woods on a hill named Paradise. Fancy! Anabelle says this girl shoots and rides, paddles a canoe and follows a trail with these rough men. Why, she is known throughout the lumber camps! Quite a personage! Of course, the men are all crazy about her."

Harvey Stafford could not be sure whether or not Grace knew of whom she was speaking.

"Not long ago this girl was with a log drive up the river, Anabelle says," continued Grace. "Cooking for the men, I believe, or something like that. And one of her men friends was hurt. The doctor had to be secured. The river was at full flood and

there was what Anabelle calls 'white water'——"

"Rapids," Stafford interjected.

"Yes? Well, they lay between this place where the timberman was hurt and the Junction. That girl came through the rapids in her canoe, down the river in the dark, and got here safely, sending the doctor back to the logging camp. Quite a feat for a girl, was it not?"

"Truly," observed Stafford.

"But of course, I presume it seemed as nothing to such roughly brought up girls. Used all their lives to tramping the woods and hunting and camping out with men. Really, I never could see anything in 'roughing it,' myself, although some girls do. But think for a moment of this wonderful lumbercamp girl who shot the rapids walking into a New York drawing room, or at the opera, or mingling with any kind of nice people. Fancy!"

Stafford laughed, too. For he had been thinking of just such possibilities, and when Grace visualized them, he saw Gypsy Patterson doing exactly the things that Grace thought would seem so preposterous.

He felt sudden confidence that Gypsy would measure up in every particular to the standard Grace set by her words. Gypsy would be a little queen! She never would be awkward or gauche anywhere. And how Grace would fail if set in Gypsy's environment!

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The momentary vexation he had felt because of what Steve M'Graw had told them in the road, linking John Longfoot and "a silly gilt locket," as Stafford called it to himself, with Gypsy, had now passed. Harvey Stafford was calmer. The very fact that Longfoot had not given the girl the present seemed, on cooler thought, a cheering fact. The fellow was doubtless realizing his place. Gypsy might have been kind to him. Stafford fancied the girl would be kind to anybody. She was of that sympathetic nature.

And what if the ignorant half-breed did give Gypsy a locket? Stafford smiled grimly to himself. He had given Gypsy a horse, a saddle, and numerous small gifts that the girl had been unable to refuse. He scarcely ever appeared at Paradise without some little offering that could not fail to please a girl like Gypsy, who had had so few presents from men.

So Stafford put aside the jealousy that had stung him the day before. What Grace said about the "wild lumbercamp girl" and her adventures only amused him. He saw in this story the explanation of his first sight of Gypsy as she shot the white water of Brindle River. It failed utterly to disturb him.

Mrs. Lemoyne returned to the Lumberman's Rest for lunch declaring that she was "jounced to a jelly." The poor woman had not been used to

horseback exercise of late. Not since her girlhood, when she had ridden team-horses bareback and astride, had she really enjoyed riding. The years had made Mrs. Loraine Lemoyne soft and delicate. And what a feeling of disgust the sights and sounds of Tall Timber Junction caused her!

So Stafford and her daughter must walk about the town without her after lunch. There was nothing else they might do.

Grace, however, wisely refrained from harping on the strain of the forenoon. She did not speak of Gypsy at all. She exerted herself to be her usual charming, volatile self—a creature of infinite variety.

She charmed Stafford. She always had been able to when she pleased to exert herself in this way.

As when in Gypsy Patterson's company, the man made few comparisons. Grace was one girl; Gypsy was another. They played upon entirely different chords in his soul. He enjoyed Grace's society, now that she was not flinging innuendoes at the girl she chose to consider her rival, fully as much as ever he had.

They wandered down by the river and he showed her the trout leaping from the brown water. He threw in bits of slab to show her how swift the current ran and how hungry were the eddies.

There were beautiful calm reaches too, where the lily pads grew thickly.

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"I will find a boat somewhere and row you and your mother down to the Maiden's Leap this evening," Stafford said. "Of course, there has to be a legend about a lovelorn Indian maid who plunged to death from a high rock when her lover died—or ran away with a Wild West show, I do not know which. It was some jump if she made it."

Grace laughed lightly. This was the mood she preferred to see him in—the cynical but cheerful attitude, with which he accepted all her follies, too.

A figure suddenly appeared out of the thicket—an old, tattered man with a huge mustache—yellowed at the corners by coffee and tobacco juice. He had one eye that squinted and it gave him a horrible leer.

The girl shuddered and passed on with quickened steps when she saw the scarecrow figure wished to halt Stafford. But she lingered within hearing.

"I say, boss," the man said, "could you lend an old feller a dollar?"

"I could," replied the president of the A.C.T.C., and quite cheerfully. "But why should I?"

"'Cause I was one of your daddy's old pards," declared the man boldly.

Stafford stuck to his rule of being "hail fellow, well met" with all these Tall Timber people. It was a pose that he felt would do him no harm.

"So you know who I am, do you?" he asked the old timber rat.

"Yes. You are young Stafford. I knowed your

father and Anson Bass and those other fellers well. My name's Crukshank—Ben Crukshank."

"Indeed?" said Stafford, drawing out a crisp bill and putting it into the old fellow's trembling hand. "I'm glad to know you."

"You ought to be," chuckled the timber rat, leering up into the younger man's face. "I was one that did your father a favor once."

"I hope he paid you well for it," said Stafford heartily.

"I presume he thought he did," giggled the old fellow. "And I had no kick comin', though I didn't know any more'n Adam what he and his pards was up to at the time."

"No?"

"It was about that piece of hard wood lying up there along the Brindle, west o' Paradise Knoll."

"Ah!" Now Harvey Stafford started and eyed the fellow more keenly. "You are that Crukshank, are you? You owned a piece of stumpage there and we bought it of you?"

"So they say! So they say!" chuckled Crukshank, nodding and grinning and showing his few remaining teeth. "So they say! That piece of hard wood wouldn't have done me any good. I was well shet of it."

"So you feel that you were treated quite fairly by my father and his partners?" idly asked Stafford, preparing to move on.

"Surely! The money I got set me up on a ranch

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over in the Bad Lands. And I'd ha' done well there only the cattle laws got too strict, and they got to putting in fences. They got me and my pards for misbranding, and I got 'leven years, all told, at Leavenworth. This is the first time I've been up this way since I got out."

"Too bad," Stafford said. "Look me up again, old man."

"Perhaps I'd better," Crukshank said, his head on one side and squinting at the corporation official.

His tone seemed to strike a suddenly discordant note. Stafford scowled.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Mebbe I better see you again," said Crukshank, drawing nearer and dropping his voice. "You see, Hen Stafford and them made one mistake when they—er—bought that timber piece of me."

"What do you mean?" demanded Stafford brusily. "If you say you didn't own it at the time the deed was made, you put yourself in the hands of the law."

"Nothin' like that," chuckled Crukshank. "The law ain't never goin' to git me again. I've had a mess of that. Listen! They made out a deed for that piece o' property. They recorded it all proper in the County Clerk's office, I'm told."

"They did."

Crukshank giggled again, his parchmentlike face writhing in a horrible grimace.

"It's all right. It's all right," he said. "Them records is all straight. But——"

He whispered swiftly a sentence or two in Harvey Stafford's ear. But his whisper was not so low that Grace Lemoyne did not hear. She heard, if she did not fully understand the significance of Crukshank's statement.

Stafford eyed the old timber rat sharply. He drew forth his bill fold and selected from it a ten dollar note.

"Let me have that dollar back, old man," he said. "I think you are more valuable to me than that," and he exchanged the ten for the one.



## CHAPTER XXV

### TWO IMPORTANT INCIDENTS

JOHN LONGFOOT was a week in going from camp to camp along the upper Brindle and through the great spruce swamps at the head of that stream. The camps at this season were for the most part abandoned, for the crews had gone out with the log drives and would not come in again until fall.

At one place Longfoot made portage to the bottom of Winnesago Lake, for it was not a long or hard carry even for a man alone. The waters of Winnesago did not seep into Brindle River, but found their outlet through the Mushquash; and at the head of the Mushquash was one of the A.C.T. C.'s biggest mills.

The product of this mill was shipped over a private road to a branch of the St. P., M. & W. Quite a settlement had grown up about the mill—a typical slab town, built for the most part on sawdust beds, streets of the same material, hard packed, and sidewalks, where there were any, of planks. Beside Slabtown, Tall Timber Junction was a metropolis.

John Longfoot was not traveling through this

country for pleasure. He had questions to ask, and he asked them of many men—most of them old residents who had known Tall Timber since the early days when this territory was really the frontier.

At Slabtown he found Marvin Jasper. John Longfoot had seen some old fellows now acting as caretakers of the lumber camps around the headwaters of the Brindle, but nobody just like Jasper.

Seventy-odd, taller than Longfoot himself, straight as a ramrod still, hair, and a lot of it, only sprinkled with gray, besides a tangled beard which, with the hair, made the old man look like a veritable wild man of the forest. He had never in his life worn a hat.

"Si Patterson? Course I remember him," he said in reply to one of Longfoot's first questions. "He was a white man. No offence meant to you, stranger, because you've got some Injun blood in your arteries. There's been many a good Injun. That most of the good ones is dead ain't their fault. But what did you want to know about Si? He's dead."

"He was my friend," said Longfoot, simply. "You can't tell me anything good about him that I don't know. And anything bad I wouldn't believe."

Jasper nodded, sitting on the sill of one of the mill doors, one of his great, bare, splay feet in his lap while he worked at a splinter in the sole of it with the small blade of his pocketknife.

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"Si left some timber claims to his adopted daughter, Gypsy. You know about her?" asked Longfoot.

"I've saw her. Likely young-un. Si sot his time-o'-day by her. Well, what of her?"

"There is some doubt—or appears to be—about the titles of Si's property."

"Uh-huh! Heard about that, too," Jasper agreed.

"The A.C.T.C. claims they bought most of his stumpage."

"Didn't they?"

"If so, what did Si do with the money?" Longfoot snapped back at him.

"Cripus! That's so. Si didn't sport around none in a plug hat an' tail coat. Nor he wasn't no miser."

"You have hit it," John Longfoot said with gravity. "Stafford and his partners did buy some of Si Patterson's timberlands. But only a small part. But they have recorded deeds covering about everything Si ever claimed he owned."

"No!"

"Yes."

"Well, it's like 'em. That Henry Stafford would suck aigs, an' they do say this son of his that's runnin' the business now, goes his pa one better; for he not only sucks 'em, but he hides the shells."

"If there was any queer business done," Longfoot said thoughtfully, "it was done away back—before this H. Harvey Stafford got into the game."

The record of deeds was made after the Tall Timber Junction fire, of course. Si was supposed to have his own deeds of the claims; but we can't find 'em. The A.C.T.C. deeds are down in black and white."

"Uh-huh!"

"But there is nothing positive about many of the deeds now on record in those books. Anybody could have a deed recorded after the fire, pay the fee, and claim it was an original deed. The clerk could remember only a small part of the destroyed records, anyway. And he's dead now."

"Yes. What you leadin' up to?"

"I am trying to find," explained Longfoot carefully, "men who remember the names of those purporting to sell these claims as now recorded to the A.C.T.C." He drew the list of names from his pocketbook.

"Ha! You think you see a nigger in the woodpile?"

"I think if we can prove it to be a fact that even one of these recorded deeds was falsely made, we can throw doubt upon all before the courts. We've got to get something on the corporation. Do you see?"

"I get you," agreed Jasper.

"Now, did you know any of these men? If any, which? And if you do know any, do you know where they are to be found now?"

Jasper motioned the paper away. He made no

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bluff about "not having his specs." His eyes, old as he was, were as keen as a hawk's.

"I never learned to read nor write," he said. "Read 'em out to me, young feller."

John Longfoot did so. Some of the names Marvin Jasper recalled. Some were strangers to him. The last on the list was Benjamin Crukshank.

"I knew the rat. That's what he always was—a timber rat," he said. "I worked with Crukshank on more'n one crew."

"What's become of him?"

"Dead, it's likely; or in jail. And by cripus! I don't believe Ben Crukshank ever owned two shirts at one time, let alone a timber tract."

"He was supposed to have owned Si's home piece—all red maple and oak."

"Who'd ha' thought it? Crukshank always appeared to drink up every dollar he got just as soon as he got it."

"Then is it a surprise to you that Crukshank should have owned timberlands?"

"Or anything else. I should say! Surprised ain't no name for it. Hi! Here comes the noon train up. We've got to load all them flats, stranger. If you've got anything more to talk about, sharp's the word."

He arose, snapped the knife shut, slipped it into his pocket, and with a mighty yawn, stretched himself. He was a giant of a man, and looked to be as tough to handle as any Longfoot had seen in

Slabtown. He strode away to meet the incoming string of empty cars, and the visitor went with him.

The first car was a box car with a slatted door. A brakeman unlocked the door, rolled it back, and a number of nondescript individuals began to jump out.

"Hard to get hands up here," said Marvin Jasper. "Jest the scourin's of the cities and jerk-water towns. Not a whole man in that bunch. Hi! Who's this?"

The brakeman, after the others were out of the car, reached in and seized a leg. A stream of sputtering objections and blasphemy came from the man who was being hauled out.

"What sort of a dump is this?" he demanded, evidently still well under the effect of his libations. "Did I say I wanted to come any deeper into this damned timber? A bloomin' sawmill town! Huh!"

"Don't you like it, old-timer?" chuckled the brakeman. "Well, the walkin' back is good. Only 'bout two million ties to count betwixt here and the Junction where they put you aboard. You ain't got no return ticket."

"That's where I did get put aboard, wasn't it?" croaked the other. "I remember now. Tall Timber Junction. And all the doin's of that derved Marmaduke Guffey and that slicker, Staf——"

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He halted. Marvin Jasper was stooping over him where he lay on the ground, hands on knees, searching the new arrival's countenance.

"Cripus!" exclaimed the gigantic old man, glancing aside at the interested Longfoot. "What's that about talkin' of angels and hearin' their wings flap? Well, this here is Ben Crukshank—but he ain't no angel."

"I don't know who you may be, you big elephant," said the squint-eyed man, whose squint was more than ever pronounced, now that he was in liquor. "But Ben Crukshank's my name, an' I ain't none ashamed of it."

"You would be if you was sober," observed Jasper. "Well, stranger, there's the very man you was askin' about. You're welcome to him."

The giant went on about his business. John Longfoot offered the prostrate drunkard his hand as an aid in climbing to his feet. Crukshank was about to take it. Then something in Longfoot's countenance annoyed him.

"Git out o' here!" he growled. "I don't want no dern half-breed helpin' me. Nor I don't have nothing to do with such."

He managed to scramble to his feet without assistance. He drew the never-failing flask from his hip pocket. Whoever had shipped him to Slabtown had not shipped him dry.

Crukshank took a long drink of the potent liq-

uor, stoppered the flask again and returned it to his pocket. Then he staggered away into the sawmill town.

"True word!" gasped Aunt Tabby Murdock, and turned the tarnished object over and over in her work-worn hands. There was a flash of color from it—a ray that blazed directly into her old eyes.

"True word!" she repeated. "Ain't that purty? An' how come it here? Gypsy! Gypsy, gal! How do you suppose this here do-funny come here on the ground by the ramblin' rosebush?"

"What is it, Aunt Tabby?" asked the girl, who was on her knees weeding young salad in the garden plot.

"See here! How that bit o' glass shines!"

Aunt Tabby dangled the heart-shaped locket from its chain and the stone flashed again. Gypsy sat back on her heels and pushed up the flapping brim of her hat with the back of her wrist. She stared at the flash of color in Aunt Tabby's hand.

"Why, where did you get that?"

"Jest found it," said the old woman. "It lay right here, trampled into the earth. Was it one o' your play-toys, Gypsy? I don't remember ever seeing it before."

She came heavily across the garden to the girl's side. Gypsy took the heart-shaped locket in her hand. It was tarnished, and so was the chain. But



something about the delicacy of the workmanship of chain and locket—above all the colorful sparkle of the stone set in it—gave the girl pause.

"I do not believe that is a plaything, Auntie," she said. "And I am sure I never saw it before."

"Ain't a mite o' sense in saying it is a real valuable," declared Aunt Tabby, shaking her head.

"And yet, I would not say it was valueless."

"True word! You never can tell. Most things is worth somethin'. But what was anybody doing around here at Paradise with a thing like that—an' droppin' it? It's real purty."

To herself Gypsy breathed the name: "John!" But she did not utter it aloud. She clutched the locket more tightly, however, at the thought. Was this the locket Steve M'Graw had spoken of? Yet, how could it have come here, under Aunt Tabby's rosebush?

The old woman saw the girl's hand involuntarily tighten on the piece of jewelry.

"Keep it, honey, if you want," she said. "But I wouldn't reckon too much on its being real gold and di'monds. Ain't such things growin' on Paradise Knoll," and off she went chuckling to herself.

Gypsy treasured the locket and chain in the bosom of her blouse. It lay there against her heart—so heavily! And the girl's heart, too, was heavy.

If this was the locket—John's gift bought for her—how came it here, trampled into the ground? And why had not John spoken about it when she

had met him on the river the other day? This puzzle troubled her exceedingly.

When she went into the house she took out the locket and chain and polished it with a chamois. How bright it was! The stone needed no polishing. She believed it was a real diamond and that the jewel was valuable.

But if it was the locket Steve had sent to Chicago for, for John——

"Steve will know!" flashed the thought into Gypsy's mind.

She knew that Steve M'Graw was working at one of the sawmills at the Junction. He had been in Blainesburg for only a day or two to see his sister. She hurried to saddle Kitsy, the brown pony, right after dinner.

"I am going to town," she said to Aunt Tabby. "Shall I take the eggs?"

"Not on that pony!" exclaimed the old woman. "Too much tickle-grease on her heels. I'd rather trust 'em to Ben Stetter's old critter. Travels easier."

"I believe you are favoring Mr. Stetter, Aunt Tabby," accused Gypsy, her eyes suddenly dancing.

"What! Me? Favoring any one o' them old nuisances? I should say not!" disclaimed the old woman, bridling. "Not sayin' but I could have any one o' them crooked sticks if I wanted such. But I know when I'm well off, I do, honey.

"Jest the same," she added slyly, "if you see Mr.

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Stafford in town, you ask him from me why he ain't been up here lately? It's gettin' so I shouldn't know him if I spooned him out o' my porridge."

She watched the girl's face sharply while she said this last. But Gypsy displayed no change of expression. Stafford had not been to Paradise since the day of their long jaunt to Mitt Mountain, but Gypsy had scarcely noted the fact, her mind had been so firmly set on John Longfoot.

She rode quickly away with a wave of her hand to Aunt Tabby. At the clearing at the foot of the path from Paradise she found the three old timbermen much excited and deeply engrossed in a number of papers that were evidently bound to be the seed of manifold bickerings.

"What are they, Uncles-all?" she asked curiously, reining in her pony by the wood piles.

"Papers Mr. Stafford sent up from the Junction. They are what he calls transcripts of deeds an' so-forth the A.C.T.C. have recorded," Sam Killock explained, in vast apparent disgust. "Huh!"

"Ain't no more what your Uncle Si give us to understand they bought of his holdings than chalk is like cheese," wheezed the fat man. "Them timber thieves done him, an' no mistake."

"Plumb ridiculous!" ejaculated Neb Crane. "If these here deeds is right an' they are recorded, you ain't got a leg to stand on, Gypsy."

"Shut up!" exclaimed Sam.

"You always was for goin' off at half cock,"

complained Stetter of Crane. "Don't you pay no 'tention to him, Gypsy. We ain't scurcely looked these documents over yet."

"You can't make two-times two more'n four, no matter if you look at it all day," growled Crane.

"Ha!" ejaculated Sam. "Who told you you knowed anything about higher mathematics? Go 'long!"

But Gypsy nodded calmly. "It doesn't so much matter, does it?" she said. "Whether I get little or much out of Uncle Si's estate, I shall be satisfied."

She rode on as the three old fellows looked sheepishly at each other. They could not tell her that—as these papers sought to prove—if the contentions of the A.C.T.C. stood in law, she would have practically nothing.

Kitsy cantered away with her to Tall Timber Junction, and once there Gypsy rode directly to the hotel. She knew Anabelle Whitman would be sure to know at which mill M'Graw was working.

There was a hitching rack before the main entrance of the Lumberman's Rest, as there was before every store of importance in the town, and even in front of the Court House. Gypsy swung down from the saddle at the hotel hitching rack and looped the reins through one of the rings.

Two women sat on the porch, and although by all indications they were of the tourist class, and therefore interesting to Gypsy, she gave them scarcely a second glance as she walked briskly up

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the steps and into the hotel. One of the strangers was of more than middle age; the other was plainly her daughter and a brilliant looking girl. Their interest in Gypsy the latter did not mark; she went on into the main hall of the hotel, calling for Anabelle.

"How-de-do, Gypsy Patterson?" said Anabelle, bustling out from the rear premises. "Are you alive? How's everything up on Paradise? Say! did you see the ladies out in front?"

"Yes."

"I'm waitin' on them," said Anabelle proudly. "I'm graduated to be ladies' maid—yes, I am! Don't know but I'll go on with 'em to the Coast an' back to New York. That's where they come from. I should think a girl could catch a feller lots quicker in New York than she can out here in Tall Timber. There's more men there."

"And more girls, too, I guess," laughed Gypsy.

"Well, yes, that may be. I didn't think of that. But I bet the girls ain't like us, Gypsy."

"More like the young lady out there on the porch," the girl from Paradise said. "I am afraid we could not very well compete with her kind."

"That's so! I didn't think o' that. See how quick she cut you out with Mr. Stafford—and complete!"

Gypsy did not even flush, but her eyes danced with amusement.

"Is Mr. Stafford interested in these visitors?" she asked.

"Why! ain't you heard? They come out here to see him. And I'm thinkin' that girl believes she's got him cinched. If she knew where Mr. Stafford was right now I bet she'd be with him."

"Where is he?"

"In the bar-room with Uncle Marmaduke. I'm hopin' they ain't up to any more tricks—like gettin' old Ben Crukshank drunk and then shanghaiing him off to a sawmill camp. Aunt Elvira says it's a disgrace. She wishes the County would go dry and then the Lumberman's Rest wouldn't have no bar."

At another time Gypsy would have been somewhat shocked at the thought of Harvey Stafford being a party to any such action as Anabelle Whitman gossiped about, but now she had other subject for thought on her mind.

"Where can I find Steve M'Graw?" she asked Anabelle abruptly.

"Steve? Oh, my! Do you want to see him, Gypsy? And you've rode clear in here to the Junction for that reason? I never knew there was anything between you and Steve."

"Oh, Anabelle!" sighed Gypsy, but with a little laugh. "Is your mind given completely to love affairs with men? Is there nothing more important and worth while in the world."

"I don't know what," Anabelle replied confi-

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dently. "And until a girl's got a feller cinched she has to keep all her eyes open—an' then some!"

"I promise not to cut you out with Steve M'Graw," Gypsy rejoined roguishly.

"Come out back," said Anabelle, "and you can slip right down through the short-cut to the mill. It's Hodden's Steve works at."

In a minute Gypsy was on the path, and with flying feet. The hum of the saws grew almost to a deafening clamor as she approached the mill. Steve was bossing the log-rolling gang, and he was leaning on a peavey in the shade, smoking his pipe.

"How-de-do, Miss Gypsy," said the big woodsmen, smiling broadly. "Did you come to see me? I'm favored!"

"I came to show you something, Steve," said the girl, quickly producing the locket and chain. "What do you say to that?"

"For the love o' Moses! He give it to you, then?"

"At any rate I have it," Gypsy said, turning her head so that Steve could not catch her expression of countenance. "This is the very locket, is it, Steve?"

"You bet it is. An' ain't it a dandy?"

"I think it is very beautiful," she said. "But—but don't tell John."

"Eh? Don't tell him what?"

"That I have it. That you've seen it. That I showed it to you."

"For the love of—well, if you say so."

"I do ask you to keep still."

"Sure, Miss Gypsy. I won't say a word. I'll be sure to keep my mouth shut about that locket, forever an' ever, Amen!"

But he was puzzled, and he followed her dainty retreating figure with wondering eyes.



## CHAPTER XXVI

### CROSS CURRENTS

As Gypsy came back through the Lumberman's Rest she found the gossipy Anabelle on the porch with the two women to whom she was playing maid. The girl from Paradise saw at once that she was trapped; there was no escape for her, for Anabelle's strident voice would carry from end to end of Railroad Avenue, if she really wished to make herself heard that far.

"Do come here, Gypsy," said Anabelle. "These here ladies want to know you. They've likely heard a lot about you from Mr. Stafford. I tell 'em you're as popular in Tall Timber as a ham-an'-aig breakfast, and I don't know nothin' more popular with these saw-mill hands, the goodness knows!"

Gypsy was curious about the visitors, and now that her mind was assured about the locket Aunt Tabby had found, she was willing to give rein to her curiosity. Anabelle introduced her to Mrs. and Miss Lemoyne. She noted that neither woman offered her hand; but Gypsy reasoned that although the friendly handclasp was universal in Tall Timber, it might not be "the thing in the East."

Gypsy swept them with a comprehending glance, and at once approved of Grace. And who would not? For Grace was a very beautiful and a perfectly groomed girl.

"Anabelle has been kind enough to tell us of the perfectly wild place in which you live," Grace drawled. "It must be lovely out there."

"Paradise is a mighty pretty place, Miss Lemoyne," Gypsy agreed.

"Fancy! And such a name!"

"I don't just know how it got that name—Paradise Knoll," the girl from the tall timber said. "Uncle Si used to say that the first wagon train through these parts followed the river—the Brindle, you know—going north. It came to our patch of maple about sunrise one morning, and the knoll was all ablaze with the first rays of the sun—which I have always thought are more brilliant than at any other time of day."

"Of course," put in Anabelle, nodding affirmatively. "He's right fresh then, and naturally brighter—the sun is."

"Fancy!" drawled Grace once more. "I am not very familiar with the sunrise."

Gypsy laughed like a clear bell—a note that, although it was not loud, penetrated to the hotel café and was recognized.

"Those teamsters, Uncle Si said, thought that sunrise over Paradise was a most wonderful sight.

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They called it the Gates Ajar, and the Door to Paradise, and somehow the final name stuck."

"Remarkable! Remarkable that such—er—rude persons should be so poetic."

Gypsy's eyes twinkled. "It makes people poetic to live out of doors, Miss Lemoyne. There is much that is beautiful to see along the trail through the Breakaway. You would do well—you and your mother—to ride that way and come to Paradise. You will be welcome."

"Thank you," murmured Grace. It was the invitation she had been wishing for. "We most certainly will come. Oh! Here is Harvey."

Stafford came along the porch with his hand out. There was not a shadow of self-consciousness in his look or manner. He met Gypsy quite as though the Lemoynes were not present.

"I am delighted to see you, Miss Gypsy," was his greeting. "I see you have met my friends—Mrs. Lemoyne and Miss Lemoyne? I am trying to show them all the beauties of Tall Timber before they go on."

"Geel that's one on me, Mr. Stafford," cackled Anabelle. "You'll make me too proud to live."

"Mother and I," drawled Grace, "are going to see some of the beauties of the deeper forest. Miss Patterson has kindly invited us to Paradise."

If a change came into Stafford's face it was only that veil that sometimes settled there and made his

countenance a mask. It was quite impossible to tell whether he was pleased or chagrined.

"Paradise Knoll is a lovely spot," he agreed. Then to Gypsy: "I had occasion, Miss Gypsy, to send the three old men in the Breakaway transcripts of our deeds. Perhaps you have seen them?"

"Not the papers, Mr. Stafford. I leave all business to my trustees," and she smiled.

"I am sorry to say that I fear we shall not easily settle our controversy," Stafford continued. "According to what I previously learned from the old men, your uncle's claims were altogether preposterous. The old man may have thought he owned much larger timber areas than was in fact the case."

He said this quietly—so low, in fact, that the others did not hear. Grace Lemoyne's eyes sparkled ominously. She thought Stafford was seeking to pacify the jealousy she presumed her rival must feel, for Gypsy's countenance had become grave.

A train of heavily laden lumber flats was pulling into town from the west and was making so much noise that even Grace's keen ears could hear scarcely a word that either Stafford or Gypsy uttered. From the caboose, as the train rolled past the hotel, a man swung down to the cinder-path. He carried a violin case.

"Oh! Here is Mr. Longfoot, mother," Grace cried:

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The tall timberman crossed Railroad Avenue swiftly, coming toward the hotel. It was Gypsy he saw and recognized first of all, and an expression washed over his copper-bronze face that Grace did not fail to note.

Gypsy turned to smile again at Mrs. Lemoyne and her daughter before departing.

"I shall hope to see you at Paradise on any day you wish to ride that way," she repeated. "Good afternoon."

She bowed and turned to the steps. Stafford went with her. They saw John Longfoot coming, but the city man did not change countenance.

"Why, John!" Gypsy cried, and had Grace Lemoyne seen her face at that moment as well as the timberman's, she might have found a revelation in it. "What brought you back by train?"

"Thought I'd better see some of the folks that have property along the river and around the broads here at the Junction. It looks like we're in for a bad flood if the rains do come."

"It must be serious if you have come back so hurriedly," Gypsy murmured.

"You are all right up there at Paradise," laughed Longfoot. His eyes sought Stafford's face. "Your mills along here may suffer as much as anybody's property, Mr. Stafford. Something should be done up above to clear out the swamp brooks. You never saw such a mess as they are in."

"I have no experience of such matters," said the president of the A.C.T.C. stiffly.

"You let Hodden and Grey tell you about it," Longfoot said quickly. "They know what we had here along the valley of the Brindle at least once before in June. There has been considerable rain already, especially up in the hills. It has been a generally wet season. The swamps stand full when they should be low by this time. All the first-growth bunch grass is under water, and rotting. Farmer's corn lands in the upper river bottoms have overflowed and the corn is covered with a green mold."

Stafford shrugged his shoulders, deliberately turned his back on the timberman, and without comment said to the girl:

"Let me put you in your saddle, Miss Gypsy."

He stepped between her and Longfoot. Indeed, Gypsy had been given small opportunity to speak to John. Stafford urged her to the pony's side.

He drew the reins from the ring at the rack, handed them to Gypsy, and then clasped his hands for her to step into.

"I hope your invitation for visitors at Paradise includes me?" he said, smiling into her face which was so close to his own for the moment.

"Of course, Mr. Stafford. Both Aunt Tabby and I have missed you," she flashed back at him with a smile that the hawk-eyed Grace did not fail to note.

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In a moment Gypsy was in her saddle and the spirited brown pony whirled on her haunches while the rider's feet sought the stirrups.

"Good-bye, all!" Gypsy shouted, as Kitsy dashed away.

John Longfoot stood in such a position that Grace could watch his face. She caught more than one fleeting expression throughout this scene—she saw his eyes grow hard and glittering. He swung from the street and Stafford, with suddenly squared shoulders. Seeing the Lemoynes and Anabelle he lifted his hat, but would have strode on with that silent greeting had Grace not halted him.

"Mr. Longfoot!" she cried, rising that she might be as quite out of earshot of the others when John approached the hotel entrance. "Mr. Longfoot, can you spare me a moment?"

"Surely, Miss Lemoyne," he replied, with some surprise.

The girl from New York had much to hide, but she was a good actress. Her heart and mind were filled with a consuming rage against Harvey Stafford. Love and hate are so near in the category of human passions that the partition between is often beaten down.

She desired Harvey Stafford just as much as ever she had. She was determined to get him in the end at almost any price. But because of the secret understanding between him and Gypsy Patterson—a revelation of which she thought she had

just beheld—Grace was ready to wreck all Stafford's business plans regarding the mooted timber claims.

"A woman scorned" is not alone a trite phrase; it is a living fact that her fury is not to be easily quenched.

"Mr. Longfoot," Grace said, in her most appealing tone and with a disarming smile, "let me ask you a very personal question?"

His countenance did not change, as he bowed, saying:

"You may ask me any question you wish, ma'am."

"But you reserve the right not to answer?" she laughed shrewdly.

He smiled then. "Try me," he said more companionably, for really it was difficult to be brusque with Grace Lemoyne when she wished to exert herself to please.

"I will. I'll be quite impudent—at least, imprudent," she said, assuming a sudden gravity. "I wish to ask you first of all if you are interested in Miss Patterson's claims upon the timber corporation?"

His eyelids barely flickered, and she could see no more expression in the orbs behind them than in two black beads.

"I have tried to aid her trustees in certain inquiries—yes," Longfoot replied.

"So I presumed from what you said on the train



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the other day and from what Mr. Stafford has let fall."

He waited. Grace came closer to him and rested a hand upon his sleeve.

"I have no particular interest in the matter, Mr. Longfoot," she whispered, her own eyes glittering and a suppressed emotion in her voice that for the moment puzzled him. "But I understand there is some doubt cast upon the validity of Miss Patterson's demands?"

"Not exactly," he told her quietly. "The doubt is upon the honesty of some of the A.C.T.C. claims. That is where the shoe pinches."

She made a gesture of dismissal of all argument. "However it may be, you would know how to use information to Miss Patterson's advantage if you secured it?"

"Try me," he said again sharply.

"Did you ever hear of a man named Crukshank?"

Longfoot might have started had he been wholly a white man. As he had told Gypsy, his strain of Indian blood sometimes gave him an advantage. He only nodded, staring straight into Grace Lemoyne's eyes.

"A dirty, horrible old man," went on the girl eagerly. "If you know him, get him to talk. The A.C.T.C. used him once, I believe.

"I overheard something that makes me believe he could help explain away Miss Patterson's trou-

bles—if he would. I did not understand all that was said; but Crukshank seems to have some hold on—well, on you know whom!

"Crukshank has disappeared from the town within a day or two. But he can be found, I presume. I think he is utterly dishonest—can be bought, it is likely, for a trifle. But—perhaps he will sell the truth quite as cheaply."

She turned from Longfoot with a nod and returned to her seat. There was fire in her cheeks and her eyes were hard and dry. Mrs. Lemoyne well knew the signs of her daughter's unleashed rage. She leaned forward to tap Grace's wrist as the latter settled rustlingly into her chair.

"Have a care, Grace!" she whispered. "Don't make a blunder now—not at this stage of the game. Patience! Self-control is your best helper."

"Mind your business!" snapped the angry girl under her breath.

"You are a little fool," observed the mother frankly. "While you were flirting with that half-breed, Harvey has got away from you again. Do you suppose you can bother him by a flirtation with that Longfoot?"

Her eyes were fixed upon the broad back of H. Harvey Stafford as he walked away from the hotel, so she did not see the flash of bitter amusement in her daughter's face.

Stafford turned in at the entrance to the office

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building in which Bob Larrabee had his room. The lawyer greeted the president of the A.C.T.C. effusively; but Stafford got at once to business.

"Have those old codgers called you into consultation yet, Larrabee?" he asked.

"Haven't seen or heard from them. Like enough they are studying over those transcripts. I have an idea the documents shocked the old fellows some."

"Perhaps. But I'd feel better if you could get that little job done at the County Clerk's office. What is the matter with you? I don't want those transcripts to be taken there for verification before those corrections in the conveyances are made," and he said it significantly.

"I tell you what it is, Mr. Stafford. You should not have been so precipitate," the lawyer said. "I want to earn a dollar just as much as any other man. But I must take precautions."

"You told me you could get at the record books at any time—that you and the County Clerk are as thick as thieves and he never would ask a question."

He said it roughly. It was a tone H. Harvey Stafford assumed when he was in a mood to use the whip-hand. Bob Larrabee flushed and paled before the masterful tone.

"That's all right! That's all right!" he hastened to acclaim. "I can do what I said I could—and I will. But I have to take the right time for it. There's a derved city chap there transcribing rec-

ords for some law firm down in St. Paul, and every time I go over there, that derved four-eyed chump is on the job."

"Who is he?"

"His name is Benson. Stopping at the hotel. Wears big, round, shell-rimmed glasses. Make him look like a frog."

"Humph! I have seen him. What seems to be his interest in the records?" with suspicion.

"Oh, it's nothing to do with the A.C.T.C.'s business. I made sure of that. He only just happens to have his nose in the very ledger I want every time I go over there."

"Get the books at night. Bring 'em over here. You can do it, you say. I want the matter closed up," Stafford commanded sternly. "It is to our advantage to settle these Patterson claims—of course, as we want them settled—without delay."

"You'd better look well before you leap, Mr. Stafford," advised the more cautious Larrabee.

"That observation antedates the Flood," said Stafford with scorn. "Precipitation is sometimes better than caution. I believe that the corporation can settle with those three old codgers there in the Breakaway who are acting for Si Patterson's daughter better than might be done later with the girl herself. She is no fool."

"No, no. Gypsy is smart. And there is John Longfoot——"

"Hang Longfoot!" snapped Stafford. "What

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you tell me he wants to do about cutting the timber shows he's a fool."

"He didn't act much like a fool in Gil Martin's matter, Mr. Stafford."

"Humph! That was a fluke. He's smart enough in some things, perhaps," admitted the New York man grudgingly.

"I don't know. I'm puzzled about John," Larabee said slowly. "If he should have any idea of what we are up to——"

"Pah! Nonsense! You get it to a head, Larabee, and have it over with quickly as can be. Get papers signed. I'll offer what they will think are generous terms, once the idea soaks into their old heads that the girl is likely to lose everything if they don't grab what they can quick. That is the way to go at 'em."

"Well——"

"You see that you advise 'em that way if they come to you," Stafford said. "Some other old timber rat like Crukshank may turn up and want to gab. He's made me enough bother."

"Got him out of town, didn't you?"

"Thanks to Marmaduke Guffey—yes. And we shipped him so far away that it will take him some time to earn his fare back," Stafford laughed harshly. "The old fool! He might do us some harm if he talked. I must say, my father and Loraine Lemoyne and those others were not as

shrewd as they might have been. Using a man for a dummy in a timberland transaction without first finding out the most important thing they should have known about him!

"It puts it up to me with a vengeance," concluded Harvey Stafford, bitterly.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### OPEN WARFARE

HAD H. Harvey Stafford known that Longfoot's mind was just then dwelling on the old timber rat, Ben Crukshank, he might indeed have been troubled regarding the outcome of his plans for the settlement of the Patterson timber claims. Longfoot had tried to converse with the intoxicated Crukshank at Slabtown; but the fellow had refused to talk to "a damned half-breed," being at the time on his dignity as a white man.

It was the threat of a flood that had brought John Longfoot back to the Junction in such haste. He had considered it a duty to abandon his canoe and duffle at Slabtown, and his own private business as well, and confer with the sawmill men and others at Tall Timber Junction.

But he had brought down the precious fiddle with him, and finding Bobolink hanging about the rear premises of the hotel, he sent the Indian lad post haste to his cabin with it.

"And you hang around the gash," he told the boy. "Something's likely to happen up there. If there is a flood, the water might rise high enough

even to do my place some damage. You never can tell."

The flats about the town, and all that low land below on Brindle River, would be submerged if the flood came, he was sure.

"It is a bad outlook, gentlemen," he told Hodden, Steve M'Graw, and several others who knew the river well, in the bar of the Lumberman's Rest. "You never saw the rips and brooks in the shape they are right now. Beaver-dams could be no worse than some of those stoppers are. The swamp exits are plugged tight. And it's raining, off and on, every day in the hills."

"What's your idea, John?" asked Hodden, a sturdy old man who had followed log drives for years before he became mill foreman for the A.C.T.C.

"We ought to gather a big gang and go upstream at once. If it isn't too late to save the country from inundation, it's a wonder! We should drop two or three men at each rip and swamp outlet, after clearing up the jams at the same," Longfoot replied briskly.

"Once that culch is out into the current, old Brindle will take care of most of it. It's the damming back of all that water that spells danger.

"If there should be a cloudburst in the hills, or anything like that, and all those dams are swept out together, there would be enough water roll down



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the Brindle to drown Tall Timber Junction to the eaves of the Court House!"

"You don't mean it, boss?" murmured M'Graw. "That would be some freshet."

"You can take it from me," Longfoot continued, "that we were never so threatened by flood since ninety-nine. And I can remember that well, child though I was."

"Me, too," remarked one of his listeners. "Railroad wasn't laid then, and this whole flat was awash."

"You don't think it would do that again?" asked another.

"What old Brindle has done once, she can do again," declared Longfoot. "Those blamed Swedes that cut over the swamps up there have laid out work for us, and no two ways about it—leaving all the outlets stoppered. It is going to cost us money to save our property down here."

"I'll go," said Steve, with a thump of his big fist on the bar.

"Yes. I can find the men all right," Longfoot observed. "And I'll stand a share of the cost. But will your people do their part, Hodden? They've got more to lose than anybody else. We jobbers have all sold our logs now, and the outcome is nothing to us."

"Why, I guess the A.C.T.C. will do what's right," the mill boss said. "Any other time, and

I'd speak to Grey and some of the others below, and say, 'Go ahead an' God bless ye'!"

"Why not now?" asked Steve, wondering at Hodden's hesitation.

"Why, you know, ordinarily we don't have the Main Squeeze here on the job." Hodden glanced around carefully to be sure only friends were in the barroom.

"Grey and me and the other mill bosses usually go right ahead and run things to suit ourselves," he pursued. "As long as we get out the lumber and keep the machinery oiled up and moving, and so make dividends for the A.C.T.C. stockholders, there ain't usually no kick from headquarters. But, you see, now headquarters is right here on the location, as the feller said."

"The big boss!" murmured Steve M'Graw.

"That's who. Mr. Stafford will have to be asked about this expenditure."

"Well, you'd better ask Mr. Stafford mighty quick, then," Longfoot said, perhaps in some disgust. "Not that he will know as much about it as a sucking babe——"

"Does my ignorance trouble you, Longfoot?" demanded a sharp voice from behind the listening group.

Stafford entered unexpectedly by the side door. There might have been the light of anger in his gray eyes, but his countenance was unruffled by any

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emotion. He had himself well under control for the moment.

"In this case it does," was John Longfoot's prompt reply. "I have been telling your mill foreman and these other men what I found up river—the conditions there threaten a flood. It is something that we all understand and of which we appreciate the peril. I am afraid you are ignorant of the conditions, and Hodden says he must confer with you before he agrees to any plan for saving Tall Timber from disaster."

Longfoot finished his speech with unmoved face and voice. He had immediately shouldered all possible wrath that Harvey Stafford might feel. He faced the president of the A.C.T.C., leaning his back against the bar rail, his thumbs in his belt, his black eyes carelessly holding their gaze upon the face of the other man.

Here John Longfoot held the whip-hand just as Harvey Stafford had held it in his New York office. Tall Timber was John's habitat. These men about him were woodsmen like himself, and understood him. Harvey Stafford keenly felt his inferiority because of physical conditions.

Had it not been "that half-breed" who had thus spoken and who seemed to be the leading spirit of this woodsman's conclave, Stafford would have listened to the advice of the natives of Tall Timber.

But his easily roused antagonism scented criticism in John Longfoot's words and manner.

"I gather, Longfoot," the A.C.T.C. man said harshly, "that you alone have seen and apprehended signs of trouble from up river?"

"I have just come from the headwaters of the Brindle."

"You went through the region alone?" rasped out Stafford. "We are to accept your unsupported statement as fact?"

A hush of silence over the room. John Longfoot's figure suddenly tensed. He no longer leaned against the bar rail. Among men of this class the lie is often passed; but it is said with a smile, or it starts trouble!

"I do not think," the timberman said slowly, "that my word needs substantiation. The facts are as I state them. We property owners along the valley of the Brindle must protect ourselves. We are giving *you* a chance to help protect the A.C.T.C. holdings."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Stafford, his face flaming.

"I'll put in two thousand dollars for a starter," Longfoot said, scanning the other faces before him. "Get the news around to all the loggers and to the merchants here, too, boys. That'll be your job, Hodden. You'll be gang boss, Steve, and you see that you take good men up river with you. I'll speak to Pillings and Rafferty about supplying your wanigan. Start your teams up the river to-night and your gang as early in the morning as possible. We'll divide up the cost when the job is done."

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"Look here!" snapped Stafford. "Is this the way you do business here? I'll agree to no such loose way of spending money. The A.C.T.C. will not subscribe a dollar until you have proved to me the necessity for this, Hodden."

Longfoot favored him with another cold glance.

"I understand. You are not in on this, Mr. Stafford. You will let your neighbors save your property for you. Nothing will be forced upon you that you are not willing to shoulder. Only—I am afraid your mills will have to shut down."

"What do you mean?" cried the enraged city man. "Shut down our mills right in the busy season—and with all that timber behind the booms?"

"If the flood comes, Mr. Stafford, your timber will not be behind the booms," Longfoot said gently. "It will be down stream, the prey of every independent mill-owner and jobber."

"Hell!"

"As for your mill hands, Steve will have to take most of those up river with him, for there are no other river men within reach. I am going back to Slabtown on the next train. It is due soon. I'll get together a gang there and come up the Winnesago to the swamps to meet you, Steve. What we can do in the next three days will tell the story.

"Good-day, gentlemen!" and he strode past the speechless Stafford and out of the hotel.

Longfoot saw the storekeepers and arranged for

Steve's credit. He knew he could depend upon M'Graw to do just as he had been told, and that he would do it at once. In an hour Longfoot had eaten, got into a change of clothing, and boarded the string of empty cars bound back for Slabtown. He did not see Stafford again.

The only person he cared much to see in any case at this time was Gypsy; and it seemed to Longfoot that she had ridden away from the hotel with unnecessary haste when he had arrived—just as though she had not cared to speak personally with him. Not before Stafford, at least!

That there was a settled understanding between the girl of Paradise Knoll and the A.C.T.C. president, Longfoot presumed he had good reason to believe. Nothing in his interview with Gypsy on the river a few days before had served to change this belief. And the air of possession Harvey Stafford had assumed when he had mounted Gypsy upon her pony just now clinched this supposition in John Longfoot's mind.

Much as he doubted Stafford's honesty of purpose, he did not doubt Gypsy's interest in the man. She was not to be blamed if she did not judge Stafford in the same way that he judged him. To the girl the president of the A.C.T.C. doubtless showed a very different side of his character than he had revealed to John Longfoot.

The timberman rattled back to Slabtown in the

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caboose of the train of empty cars with something besides anxiety about a possible freshet in his mind. His quarrel with Harvey Stafford in the bar of the Lumberman's Rest scarcely made a ripple upon the surface of his thoughts. But the situation between Stafford and Gypsy troubled him.

On the one hand he feared Stafford meant no good to the girl. That he was opposed to Gypsy's business interests could not be doubted. And even if he was really in love with her, would her property rights be conserved by a man of Stafford's character and one in his position?

What Grace Lemoyne had told John about Ben Crukshank had not added to the timberman's peace of mind, either. He knew the name of Benjamin Crukshank had been recorded by the A.C.T.C. as being that of the former owner of that very piece of timberland on which Gypsy's home was built. Marvin Jasper had declared that Crukshank had always been a drunken wastrel—not at all the kind of man to have cannily bought timber claims.

John Longfoot wanted to make Ben Crukshank talk. Miss Lemoyne's whisper had spurred his interest in the timber rat. Nor was he at all in doubt as to why Grace had told him her suspicions.

The Lemoynes were financially interested in the American Consolidated Timber Corporation, yet Grace had revealed a desire to cross Harvey Stafford in a way which might injure her own money affairs. There could be but one emotion strong

enough to inspire this act on the girl's part—jealously!

"That lady is surely sore," was the way Longfoot expressed it to himself. "And if she feels like helping me, why should I refuse the favor? I'll make Crukshank talk if I have to put him under the influence of laughing gas!"

However the influence of that volatile essence might have affected Ben Crukshank, the influence he was still under when Longfoot reached Slabtown precluded the younger timberman from getting anything out of the rat that night.

"I don't know where he gets it. There's bootleggers around the camp," said Marvin Jasper to Longfoot. "But there he is over in that hutch drunk as a fiddler, an' him not workin' a day since he come. I bet that old rat was weaned on forty-rod."

Longfoot strolled over to the shack which Ben Crukshank had appropriated as his own, and looked in at the open door. It was growing dark and there was no window in the hut. There were two bottles on a table by the bunk. In the neck of one was thrust a guttering candle. The other was still half full of the pale yellow liquid which went by the name of "forty-rod."

"Hullo!" croaked Crukshank, who was lying in the bunk. "Here's that derved half-breed again. What you want, Injun?"

"You used to own timberlands down Tall Tim-



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ber Junction way, didn't you?" asked Longfoot, probing to see how drunk the old fellow really was.

"You're a liar! Don't own a foot o' land. Not as much as would bury me. I'm a poor old feller, without a friend in the world."

"But you must have had friends when you owned so much property," said the crafty timberman.

Crukshank met craft with craft. His squint-eye and his leer made him look like some wicked old bird as he rose half way up to stare at John Longfoot.

"Now you are tryin' to learn something, ain't you, Injun?" he scoffed.

"Of course I am."

"Nothin' doin'," declared Crukshank. "Jest shut the door in your own face!" and, falling back again, in a moment he began to snore as though sound asleep.

When the disappointed Longfoot had closed the door as requested and departed, Crukshank rose upon his elbow and seized the whisky bottle, chuckling.

"He'd 've wanted a drink if I hadn't got rid of him as I did," and he took a long draft before setting back the bottle and lying down in the bunk again.

He repeated this several times within the hour. The concoction of fusel oil, wood alcohol and burnt sugar was having its effect upon his optic

nerves. He was soon actually blind and pawed about for the whisky bottle like a new-born kitten.

He got hold of the other bottle and joggled the candle out of it. The candle rolled off the table into the sawdust; but Crukshank did not see.

He managed to get the neck of the empty bottle to his lips. He lay back on the husk pillow and tipped the bottle farther and farther.

"Damnation!" he mumbled at last. "Mush 've drunk th' lash drop—th' lash drop——"

The bottle rolled from his grasp. He sank into stupor. A narrow, blue, corkscrew of smoke arose from the hard-packed sawdust of the floor where the candle wick was still sputtering in its own grease.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### VISITORS AT PARADISE

JOHN LONGFOOT had made at least one shrewd guess regarding Gypsy and Harvey Stafford. The girl did not wish to talk to John before the other man—her heart was altogether too full at the moment.

The locket that John had discarded as so inept and futile when he had observed Gypsy and Stafford together at Paradise was reposing in the breast of the girl's blouse—lying against her heart, as warm and precious as anything she had ever treasured.

Almost did Gypsy, who was not lacking in imagination, know just how the pretty locket came to be lying under Aunt Tabby's rose bush. Nobody but John could have brought it there. He was not a man to lose anything carelessly, let alone such a precious possession as this.

Gypsy believed—it came to her in a flash when Steve assured her this was really John's purchase—that John had been to Paradise at some time when she had known nothing of his visit.

He must have come there with the locket in his

hand, eager to give it to her. She took it out of her bosom and looked at it with glistening eyes as Kitsy, the "tickle-grease" now out of her heels, jogged along the tote road through Breakaway. Such a pretty gift! She knew it must be valuable if John had bought it for her. This was a real diamond. Why, it must have cost dollars on dollars!

And why had he dropped it—cast it aside as worthless—and never said a word about it to her? There had been a strange air about John the other day when he rescued her from her predicament in midstream. He seemed absent-minded—not at all his usual self.

For John Longfoot was almost always in merry mood when they were together. How light-hearted he had been when she had so frequently visited the cabin in the gash while he was laid up with his injured leg. That was not the John who would cast away such a pretty locket as this in her hand and say nothing about it.

Gypsy's memory answered the question that rose in her mind. The reason for changes in John's manner was supplied from the same source. The girl flushed warmly as she accepted all this as the fact.

John Longfoot had seen Stafford at Paradise and had seen the man and her in an attitude that suggested an affectionate understanding.

Gypsy was too fair-minded to be angry with John or to blame him for jumping at a conclusion that was not correct. She had brought about the misapprehension herself. She had not mentioned Stafford's name to John all the time he was laid up; and it must have seemed to him that she had deliberately hidden from him her friendship with the president of the American Consolidated Timber Corporation.

John's most natural thought would be that Gypsy had hesitated to speak of Stafford because of the tender interest she felt in the city man. Inept as John was as a lover, the girl knew well enough that he thought much of her. And here was this locket to prove it.

She squeezed the pretty jewel tightly in her hand for a moment and smiled with dewy eyes out into the broad aisles of the pines as Kitsy carried her homeward.

John loved her! Of course he did. And Gypsy thought it very sweet to be loved.

Here were two men who had shown her—proved beyond peradventure—that they admired her. She, Gypsy Patterson, the unknown waif whom Uncle Si had found yonder on Eagle Ridge, a veritable outcast of the universe!

One of these lovers was already great in the world—wealthy, wise, and cultivated; all, Gypsy thought, that a man could be in the social scale. The other she had known since childhood, his stable

qualities as assured as heaven itself; she trusted John Longfoot as her right hand trusted her left.

But which did she love, if either?

To be loved by Stafford stirred her vanity, as was inevitable. And, further, Stafford aroused her sincere admiration. But there was a settled affection in her heart for John that she could not, if she would, deny.

But were either of these emotions the quality of love that a maid should give the man she was to marry?

Gypsy sighed. She dropped John's gift into her bosom again. She patted the brown mare's neck, and Kitsy arched it, and shook her mane, and whinnied softly.

"Can you help me decide, Kitsy?" murmured Gypsy Patterson. "Were you ever between two perfectly splendid lovers? And how did you decide, my dear? How did you find out which? Or did you run away from both?"

Gypsy turned off before reaching the farmstead of the three old timbermen, arriving at Paradise by another path. She did not want to discuss just then with the executors of Si Patterson's will the business of the estate which had been mentioned by Mr. Stafford so recently. Therefore Killock and Stetter and Crane tramped up the path to Paradise the next noon, bringing, as usual, an argument with them.

"I tell you," Neb Crane was saying, pounding

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away with his cane as he hobbled around the house, "we ain't had such a spell of wet weather in this region since eighty-seven. Then it did rain some, in the spring, I do allow. Why, there wasn't even a horse-trough in the county that wasn't about eleven foot deep!"

"Listen at him! Listen at him!" wheezed the fat man. "Did you ever hear sech a liar, Sam? Why, Neb must ha' been fast asleep all through that flood we had in ninety-two."

"We didn't have no flood in ninety-two," stated Crane with positiveness. "That big rain was in eighty-seven. Ain't I right, Sam?"

"You're both wrong—same as usual," declared Killock. "You fellers would likely have overlooked Noah's Flood if you'd been on this footstool at that identical time. The big flood we had when Tall Timber Junction was wiped out like a saucer was in ninety-nine."

"Your granny!" wheezed Eben Stetter.

"Hi! Yi!" yelped Crane. "That was only a little shower beside o' what we had in eighty-seven."

"Ninety-two!" barked the asthmatic man.

By this time they had arrived before the front porch. Aunt Tabby was sitting in the usual creaking rocking chair, briskly knitting.

"Look here, you boys," she said in her deep voice, and eying them through her spectacles as a school-teacher might her refractory pupils, "how

many times have I got to tell you you shouldn't bring your dratted quarrels here to Paradise? I tell you I won't have it, noway! It's scandalous the way you are always rowin' and bickerin'—you all old enough to be thinkin' of climbin' the real path to a real Paradise."

"There you go again, Miss Tabby," stuttered Crane. "Flingin' our age up at us that-a-way. I know Sam an' Eben is purty broken in their healths. But me—if it 'twasn't for this knee I'd be as lively as a cricket."

"You'd be a purty rusty old cricket," scoffed Aunt Tabby, clicking her needles.

"He ain't half so spry as I am," declared Stetter. "I don't see where he gets his gall to talk that way. I admit Sam's breakin' up some——"

"What's that?" demanded Killock bristling and glaring with his one good eye. "There ain't a livin' thing the matter with me but my glass eye. I'm sound as ever I was—sound as a nut."

"An' the squirrels are after you for that reason," said Aunt Tabby, composedly. "You are all three cranks. Some of your buttons is surely loose! No sane an' sensible men would be forever quarrelin' an' bickerin' same as you do.

"If you three should be offered right now your harp and crown apiece, you'd be a-scrappin' about who had the best fittin' crown and who could play his harp best."



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"Well, it wouldn't be Ben Stetter, anyway, that could play best," muttered Crane. "He ain't got no ear for music at all."

"If that's what you've got," wheezed the fat man, staring at Crane's rather prominent ears, "deliv-er me! I never knowed the size of your ear had anything to do with music. Next to a mule, then, I guess you have got the biggest ear for harmony in Tall Timber County. And mebbe you'd have a voice like one, if you tried it out."

Killock chuckled. "You can't do nothin' with them, Miss Tabby. They will scrap to the end of the chapter. Me—I'm all for peace and quietness, I am. If I was around here all the time," he pursued boldly, "there wouldn't never be no fussin' at all."

"Hi! Yi!" yelped Crane.

"Listen at him!" puffed Stetter.

"Now, hush—all three of you!" ejaculated Aunt Tabby with more than ordinary vigor. "I can't count stitches for your clatter. I wouldn't have any one of you round for nothin' you could name—an' certain sure not for your sweet dispositions. There! Here's Gypsy, if you want to see her."

"Gypsy," Sam Killock said, as the three old fellows perched along the edge of the veranda like three old crows on a rail fence, "we've got bad news for you."

"Just as I told you yesterday," croaked Crane. "I knowed it, first squint."

"Aw, shut up an' let Sam tell her," wheezed Stetter.

Killock went right ahead, having made up his mind to get the bitter business over with.

"Them there claims of Si's, unless we can find his original deeds or better evidence, ain't got a leg to stand on. I went down to the Junction last evening myself an' seen Bob Larrabee. I showed him them transcripts of the A.C.T.C. deeds Mr. Stafford give us. Bob agrees with us, that we wouldn't have a case in court against the corporation."

"But, Uncles-all! I thought that was exactly what we did not want to do—to go to law about it!"

"So 'tis! So 'tis!" exclaimed Killock. "But we had to find out how we stood legally. I've got to tell you, Gypsy, that there ain't none of your uncle's properties safe. Not one."

"Just what do you mean?" she asked, while Aunt Tabby listened appalled.

"Why, Bob says that them deeds the A.C.T.C. recorded after the fire invalidates all the claims Si made—if the deeds stand in law. And, of course, they do. They cover every foot of them timberlands Si Patterson always said he owned. Even this here piece of maple—and Paradise Knoll itself—even the house you are livin' in, Gypsy."

"Mercy on us!" ejaculated Aunt Tabby. "You mean to sit there an' tell us, Sam Killock, that Mr.

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Stafford is goin' to rob Gypsy of her home an' all she's got?"

"Oh, Aunt Tabby! it's not Mr. Stafford," Gypsy said. "This was done long before Mr. Harvey Stafford was at the head of the timber corporation. Isn't that so, Uncles-all?"

"That's right," Neb Crane admitted.

"You can't blame Harvey none," from Stetter.

"But we've got to make a settlement with Harvey Stafford," Sam Killock put in.

"It is all because poor Uncle Si was an uneducated man," Gypsy sighed. "Yet he must have understood the necessity of having proper titles and deeds and getting them recorded. He always said he had a verbal agreement with Henry Stafford about selling his timber to the corporation from time to time, as Stafford could afford to buy it. That is why he did not cut it himself."

"But there ain't nothing about that option in Si's papers—what few we could find," objected Killock, shaking his head. "All we got is a list of what property he bought, and when he bought it, 'way back. But not a deed in sight."

"Didn't he have the old deeds recorded?" asked Aunt Tabby.

"Supposedly he did—before the fire. Them records went up in smoke. And if he saved the original deeds, he never bothered to take 'em to the county clerk's office again," Killock said gloomily enough.

"Then these deeds of the timber corporation must be forgeries," Gypsy said, aghast. "They haven't got Uncle Si's name on them."

"Got names that we never heard of before—some of 'em," grumbled Killock.

"I never would have thought it of Mr. Stafford," groaned Aunt Tabby.

"It is not his fault, I tell you," Gypsy said impatiently.

"But he's goin' to benefit by them, and you are goin' to lose—ain't I right?" demanded the practical old woman.

"How much am I going to lose, Uncles-all?" repeated the girl sadly.

The three old men looked at each other. Each in his different way showed anxiety and a wish to dodge the question.

"Hi! Yi!" muttered Crane.

"Well—now," wheezed Stetter.

"You will have it!" blurted out Killock at last. "There ain't scarcely a smitch of money left in the bank for you, and you ain't got sure possession of a foot of Si's claims."

"Why!" gasped Aunt Tabby, "we are as poor as Job's turkey, then."

"Just about," muttered Crane.

"And that didn't have no stuffin', as I remember," agreed Stetter.

"Is it as bad as that, Uncle Sam?"

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Killock nodded slowly and solemnly. He could not speak.

Before any of the five found tongue again there sounded a hail from the back of the house.

"It's Mr. Stafford himself, I do declare!" exclaimed Aunt Tabby.

"There's more'n him," growled Crane. "I hear women."

"It is those ladies I met yesterday at the Junction," Gypsy said rather wearily, rising. "They wanted to ride out to see the place."

"Them Lemoynes?" asked Sam Killock. "I heard about them in town. Loraine Lemoyne's folks. You remember Loraine Lemoyne, don't you, Miss Murdock?"

"I should say I did!" replied Aunt Tabby.

"And you remember who he married, don't you?"

"Why, I don't know as I do," said the old woman slowly. "I expect it was somebody purty high-an'-mighty. Loraine Lemoyne was a purty fancy feller himself."

Neb Crane began to cackle shrilly and Stetter to wheeze. But before Sam Killock could speak further Gypsy returned with the visitors trailing her.

Mrs. Lemoyne, in a tight-fitting riding habit which accentuated her flesh, was directly behind her daughter, while Stafford followed. Mrs. Lemoyne wore a double eyeglass attached to a black ribbon. She raised this and set it astride her nose the better to gaze upon Killock, Stetter, and Crane.

Then her glance wandered to Aunt Tabby. The latter had half risen from her chair to make a proper courtesy. Her lips were open for speech. But suddenly she fell back in the complaining rocking chair, her mouth for the moment ajar. Then:

"True word! It's never Sissy Boggs that was? Why—why——"

Aunt Tabby became momentarily speechless again. As for Mrs. Loraine Lemoyne, she was at first utterly aghast. She dropped the glasses to the end of the ribbon. Her rubicund face grew more fiery. Horror and amazement looked out of her pale eyes.

Her daughter turned haughtily to the troubled woman. "Who is this person, mother?" she demanded.

"Why," cried Aunt Tabby, bustling to her feet now, "I never knowed! I never knowed! I heard you got married to an Easterner, Sissy, but I never did hear who it was. Loraine Lemoyne's wife! And now his widder. True word! I knowed you'd set your cap for him. You was great for the fellers, anyway, Sissy.

"True word! It's good to set eyes on you again," declared Aunt Tabby, coming heavily down the steps to meet her old friend. "And you look real swell."

"Tabby Murdock!" murmured Mrs. Lemoyne, quite carried off her pedestal by Aunt Tabby's heartiness. "How well you look!"

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"I'm gray as a rat—you know I am," declared Aunt Tabby, bridling. "But you keep your looks wonderful. Or do you use sage tea?" and she chuckled again deep in her throat. "I did one spell, but then I'd forget of it an' my hair'd get to look parti-colored like a chinchilla worsted mitten. So I give it up. If old age is bound to come on us, says I, let it come easy."

She seized the other woman in a hearty embrace. Mrs. Lemoyne, after all, had memories of her own that were sweet. Tabitha Murdock had been very kind to her when Sissy Boggs was a girl. She yielded her lips to the good woman's caress.

"Mother!" gasped Grace, as near fainting as she ever had been in her life.

"Oh, Tabby!" half sobbed Mrs. Lemoyne. "It was such a long time ago."

"Wasn't it? Half a lifetime. True word!" agreed Aunt Tabby.

Stafford stood back, watching the surprising scene with his usual cynical expression. Grace's face was worth studying. Anger—horror—despair, fled one after the other across her countenance.

Stafford knew well enough that Grace had insisted on coming to Paradise to see with her own eyes how "common" Gypsy was and how different her home life and surroundings were from any which Grace and Stafford knew. Grace courted comparison in Stafford's mind.

"And mother certainly has spilled the beans!" thought Stafford in vast amusement.

For Mrs. Lemoyne, once having been caught by Aunt Tabby, saw the futility of clinging to any of her city airs and graces. Besides, Aunt Tabby was too frank and open-hearted herself to notice them. They would have been quite lost on the good soul.

"And is this your girl, Sissy?" she cried, approaching Grace. "She favors Loraine—an' he was a handsome man, I always did say. But to think I never knowed you got him, Sissy!"

The horrified Grace was seized upon. A handshake would not do for Aunt Tabby. She delivered a resounding kiss on both the girl's cheeks.

"You are a mighty purty girl, my dear—true word! You're some older than Gypsy, I reckon. Let me make you both acquainted with these neighbors of ours," and she wheeled ponderously to indicate Killock, Stetter and Crane.

"These was Si Patterson's old pards. Good men and true, but as quarrelsome among themselves as a parcel of wildcats. Make you acquainted with Mrs. Lemoyne and her daughter," added Aunt Tabby. "Sissy Boggs and me worked in Shattuck's eating-house in Blainesburg nigh thirty years ago."

Grace's pride was snaffled. She could not display an iota of that scorn which she had intended. To assume any pride or betterment over Gypsy Patterson, after this revelation of her mother's girlhood



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in the tall timber, would be the height of folly. Whatever else she was, Grace was not a fool. Although her temper had caused her to act unwisely on occasion, she was too greatly overwhelmed now to do anything but suffer a chagrin that was as bitter to her taste as wormwood.

She scarcely observed Harvey Stafford and Gypsy as they talked together at the far end of the porch.

"Miss Gypsy," said the president of the A.C.T.C. "I fear—as I told you yesterday—that the papers I sent your trustees will surprise both them and you. They astonished me, indeed. Those deeds cover properties that I had no idea myself the corporation had claim to. I have taken a good many things regarding the beginnings of the A.C.T.C. for granted. These among other things."

"I was quite sure you had no knowledge of any wrong done Uncle Si," she rejoined. "For if your company really controls all those lands Uncle Si thought were his, they were obtained from him without proper compensation being paid."

"I am afraid," Stafford said slowly, "that the old man never really owned any of the stumpage he claimed. There were a lot of these old squatters, you know, who never even filed their claims. Mr. Patterson thought he had a right to the timberlands; but he had not made himself legally right."

"Oh, Mr. Stafford, that could scarcely be possible. Uncle Si was one of the first settlers in Tall

Timber County, and he held public offices. He knew about the legal procedures to cover timber-rights, I am sure."

"But he recorded no deeds."

"Not since the fire. No."

"Don't you see, Miss Gypsy, that we cannot go back of the county records?" demanded Stafford. "Those are all we have to go by—our recorded deeds. The burden of proof of your uncle's claims must rest on you. And how are you going to prove your case in court?"

"I don't know, Mr. Stafford," murmured the girl, greatly troubled. "Then Aunt Tabby and I will be penniless."

"I hope not, Miss Gypsy," he murmured, seemingly quite shocked by her statement.

"Yes. I shall have nothing. The Uncles-all say your deeds cover even the homestead lot. Aunt Tabby and I will be turned out."

"Never!" exclaimed Stafford, vigorously. "Right is right; and I fail to admit the justice of your Uncle Si's claims. Nevertheless, I shall not see you stripped of everything. There may have been some verbal understanding between my father and Patterson. I have found certain letters Si had written for him years ago to my father indicating that he thought money was due him. We did buy some lands of him, and perhaps we got them at a price much under their real value.

"I will see what I can do for you. Really——"

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"I do not want charity, Mr. Stafford," Gypsy interrupted proudly. "I am quite able to support myself, if need be. I do not want what I am not rightfully entitled to. And if I should need assistance the people here in Tall Timber will stand by me. I know them all—and they know me. Let us join the others, Mr. Stafford."

## CHAPTER XXIX

### SLABTOWN—AND CRUKSHANK

JOHN LONGFOOT had returned to Slabtown at the bottom of Winnesago Lake with more than the mystery of Ben Crukshank on his mind, although the probability that the timber rat held the key to the swindle worked by Henry Stafford and his partners so long ago was important enough.

Over the high range of hills beyond the Winnesago and the spruce swamps hung black clouds which were emptying into the high lakes and torrents—those same torrents that flooded the swamps during the winter and early spring. The phenomenal rainfall of these later weeks was creating a situation, Longfoot knew, that would be disastrous for hundreds of square miles of the lowlands to the south, if the swamp outlets were not cleared and the water allowed to run off gradually.

There were natural dams in the hills that must burst before long. If one burst all would go out. The forest and swamps held millions of tons of water that would pour over the lowlands with the urge of the mountain torrents behind it. A flood

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such as Tall Timber and vicinity had seldom known must be the result.

If Steve M'Graw could gather his gang and come up the Brindle to the swamps, clearing the dammed outlets as he moved north, much of the backed-up water would be loosed in season and the deep bed of the river might carry it away ahead of the hill floods. Now John Longfoot's job was to gather an equally strong gang of rivermen at Slabtown and go up the lake to aid in this task at the mouths of the brooks emptying into the upper Brindle.

The private railroad to Slabtown was run by telephone, and there was wire connection to Tall Timber Junction. Had H. Harvey Stafford given the word to his superintendent at Slabtown, a gang of rivermen could have been made ready in an hour to start for the headwaters of the Brindle.

Longfoot knew better than to expect such assistance from the president of the A.C.T.C. He had seen that in Stafford's countenance in the barroom of the Lumberman's Rest that assured him the man would exert all his influence to thwart what, in his jealousy and rage, he considered was something "that half-breed" desired to do. Stafford, as had Grace Lemoyne, allowed jealousy to throttle his good sense.

Longfoot knew, however, the timbre of these men working for the A.C.T.C. at Slabtown. They were clannish to a degree, and held that independent

attitude toward their employers that American labor usually considers due its dignity.

A flood in the Brindle would not personally interest many of these men at Slabtown. The lake and the Mushquash could take care of all the water that would ever drain into this water-shed. The danger to Tall Timber Junction meant nothing to Slabtown.

H. Harvey Stafford had allowed his spite to threaten injury to his own property. He could have ordered his hands at Slabtown to help save the corporation property at the Junction. And he would not!

Millions of feet of timber were behind the several booms on Brindle River. If the booms went out, that meant nothing to the jobbers and contractors like John Longfoot. Their work was finished with the felling, skidding, hauling, and dumping of the logs into the river and rafting them to the mill booms. These logs were now all paid for. Nor did Longfoot have a single log stacked on the banks of the Brindle awaiting another drive.

He was giving his time and effort in this matter purely for the weal of the community. People at a time like this must work together. Past experience assured Longfoot that if the flood came, a deal of property would be drowned out, if not human lives lost, in the valley of the Brindle.

He knew how to rouse the interest of the river-

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men and other workers at the Slabtown mill. He had already spoken with several of them besides Marvin Jasper. Ordinarily, all he would have had to do would be to get a crowd together and tell them of the conditions on the upper Brindle. A call for help would cause them to shut down the mills in the very face of Stafford's orders to the contrary.

Only, Longfoot had returned to Slabtown at an extraordinary time. This was pay day, and more than Ben Crukshank had got hold of supplies of the bootleggers' forty-rod. There was a big "hoe-down" billed for the night, too. Dance hall women from several other camps had come up on the train, the sheriff ignored the entrance into the supposedly dry district of a quantity of the acrid liquor, and a "high old time" was already under way when Longfoot arrived.

As he came across the tracks from the hut where he had left Crukshank in a drunken stupor he saw many signs of the beginning of the debauch. He turned into the Keylog Saloon, behind which was the dance hall in which the principal festivity was to be held.

"Don't talk to us about river work, John," shouted one fellow, when the timberman approached the crowd at the bar. "We're going to make a night of it—all of us. You're going to make a night of it, too, you old Injun! Come on!"

Nothing but soft drinks were supposed to be

served over the bar, but already some of the rougher element were almost as drunk as Crukshank.

"If our heads don't ache too bad in the morning we'll go with you, John," said one of the soberer fellows. "Promise you a good crew in the morning."

When it became known that the fiddler engaged especially to accompany the usual piano player had not arrived, John Longfoot became more popular than ever. For it was known that he could fiddle and there was an instrument in camp.

The visitor had not expected to get out of Slabtown with a crew before morning. His credit was just as good with the merchants here as at the Junction. And to be "a good fellow" with the crowd would aid in getting together the gang he desired for river work. Besides, John Longfoot was a friendly soul. He became for the time being the merry-hearted fellow he had often been in the timber camps. His playing of the fiddle had rhythm to it that ordinary fiddlers did not possess. His music set the most sluggish foot tapping the boards.

He gave himself up to the charm of the music, too—his brown eyes flashing, his damp hair curling about his forehead, his dark face beaming. The blood of his French forebears was now in the ascendancy.

He beat time with his heavy boot sole on the platform where he stood to play, shouting the changes



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in the dance numbers in a resonant voice; for the old-fashioned square dances were very popular among these people.

Occasionally an excited man would leap into the middle of the floor and jig. These "solo dances" were vastly appreciated, and the crowd cheered each attempt to the echo.

They shouted for John Longfoot at last. Nothing would satisfy them but his taking the floor and giving them an exhibition of his agility.

"Johnny's the boy! He can beat 'em all!" bawled one fellow. "Clear the floor for a real dancer."

"Heap big Injun! Go to it, boy!" shouted old Marvin Jasper, fully as excited now as any of the younger men.

Longfoot did not lay down the fiddle. He used the bow quite as skillfully as he did his feet. With the instrument tucked under his chin he bounded into the open space and danced a *pas seul* that brought down the house.

In the midst of the acclamation of his turn the front door of the windowless dance hall was flung open. A breathless man sprang in, bringing with him a glare of light before which the old lamps paled.

"Git out, you bullies!" the newcomer roared. "The whole east end of the town is afire! We are due to burn to a cinder right where we are if the fire crosses the railroad tracks!"

The roar of the flames almost drowned their voices, now the door was open. The red glare blinded them as they thronged out of the place into the sawdust street. That sawdust into which Crukshank's tipped-over candle had fallen!

The great plain of the inflammable stuff on which Slabtown was built was already undermined by tunnels of fire. A shack just across the railroad suddenly sloughed sideways and was buried in a geyser of flame which spurted from some subterranean furnace.

The rising wind was driving the flames toward the more populous part of the town. The right-of-way of the railroad was not wide enough to halt the conflagration in any case. Long, crimson ribbons of flame were already spanning the lane between the two divisions of the hamlet. Disaster threatened Slabtown—the same disaster that had once overcome Tall Timber Junction—and many another sawmill town.

The dance hall crowd boiled out of the Keylog, the women running, screaming, in their scant attire to the hotels for their possessions. The men formed bucket brigades and got out all the hose in the town. But the place was doomed. The fire spread underground, through trails of dry and powdery sawdust, breaking forth in the most unexpected places. It had been under way at least two hours before the rising wind had brought it to the surface.

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John Longfoot was one of those who were most practical in aiding in the attempt to save the town. Under his direction the few two-story structures along the railroad tracks were dynamited. Pipe lines were established back of these ruins with which to fight the flames' advance. The great pumps at the mill forced heavy streams through the hose; but Longfoot knew from the first that nothing but a sudden and heavy rainfall would quench the fire or save the timber west of the town.

Suddenly he thought of Ben Crukshank, whom he had last seen drunk in his shack east of the railroad and near the lake shore. Some of the shacks in that direction were still standing. He could see them between the rolling clouds of smoke.

The fire seemed to have started over there; but it crept but slowly toward the lake against the wind.

Longfoot dropped what he was then doing and started on a run to skirt the fire. He had crossed the tracks. A train of empty cars was standing below the station, to which the locomotive was already coupled. The dance hall women and others were clambering aboard these cars.

Longfoot got out of the scorching heat, and behind the fire. There was a narrow strip of the town between the burned section and the lake shore that still stood. But it seemed to be abandoned.

Shacks were blazing here and there; but the flames ribboned out toward the railroad, wavering

bannerlike in the wind. The scene was made as light as day and the smoke was not now in the timberman's eyes. He scarcely expected to find anybody here; but, yet—

He saw the burned carcass of a cow in the ruins of what had been a stable. A little way beyond something moved between two standing shacks—something that crawled painfully on the ground. He ran forward, his soul sick with the horror of the scorched and tattered object.

It was a man—a horribly blackened, smoking figure. "Water! Water!" he croaked with feeble voice. "Where's the lake! I'm burned up inside! Water!"

Longfoot bent over the victim. It was Crukshank—recognizable despite the smoke and fire. Whether he had actually sucked fire into his lungs, or it was the effect of the potent liquor he had drunk, the man plainly suffered greatly.

The timberman picked him up and strode with him toward the lake. Crukshank screamed from the pain of his burns and fainted. At the lakeside Longfoot dashed water in his face till he had recovered. He filled and held his pocket cup to the old man's lips.

"Good! Good!" cackled the timber rat through cracked and bleeding lips. "It didn't get me that time. Not yet—not yet. But I'm afire inside, boy."

He coughed and spat a bloody foam. John Long-

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foot was sure that he must have serious internal injuries. And not a doctor in Slabtown! There was too much excitement here in any case to find help for the old fellow.

"Woke up—shack all afire inside," muttered Crukshank. "Just rolled right out o' the bunk, and there I was in an oven—sawdust all ablaze. Don't know how I did get out, boy," and he coughed again.

"Don't talk," advised Longfoot. "I'll get you out of here——"

The locomotive whistled its last call for the fugitives. A gust of wind, stronger than before, made the flames leap rods into the air. The whole town was a sea of fire. The fire-fighters fled before the incinerating blast.

Longfoot realized that there was small chance of his reaching the train with Crukshank in his arms before it started out of the burning town. Blazing faggots swirled high in the air. The edge of the timber west of the town was already ablaze.

"The lake for us!" exclaimed the timberman.

His own canoe he had left turned over on the shore near by. He set it afloat and made a bed in it of old sacking for the injured man. Then he lifted Crukshank again and placed him in the craft.

He got in himself, taking the stern, paddle in hand. He looked back at the mill. That was already ablaze, and a sheet of fire was spread out

just above the surface of the Mushquash. The flames were straining like leashed hounds for the forest on the other shore of the river.

Safety and a doctor for Crukshank lay in the other direction. The man must have medical attention as soon as possible if his life was to be saved. Longfoot had heard of people inhaling flames into their lungs. It might be that Crukshank had suffered this affliction, for it was plain he was in great agony.

The nearest doctor of any account was at Tall Timber Junction. Doctor Hewitt was a physician of note and all the timbermen had faith in him. To the Junction and Doctor Hewitt, then, Longfoot proposed taking this miserable wreck of humanity and that as quickly as possible.

With deep and powerful strokes he sent the canoe flying up the lake. Before he had gone five miles the entire shore about the head of the Mushquash was a sea of flames. Slabtown was being wiped off the map.

There had been rain enough of late, and a forest fire would not travel fast at the sap season, in any case; but nothing but a heavy downfall would completely quench the flames.

That came, however, before morning. Thunder rolled among the hills to the north of Winnesago. When the rain reached the lake it sheeted it as with a curtain. It poured upon the open canoe and well

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nigh smothered the two voyagers. Longfoot had to bail to keep Crukshank from drowning where he lay in the bottom of the craft.

He was half deafened by the booming of the Brindle when the canoe rubbed its nose on the strand at the head of the lake. The portage was half a mile long. Crukshank could not have dragged himself ten yards.

In fact, John Longfoot lifted him from the craft again as he might a child and laid him tenderly in a dry spot under a spreading spruce.

"You'll do all right here, old fellow," he said, "till I carry the canoe across to the river."

"My God! don't leave me, boy," begged Crukshank hoarsely.

"I can't pack you and the canoe at the same time. I'll have to leave you," said the younger man but with sympathy. "I'll get back as soon as possible."

But it was daybreak before he returned for his companion. Crukshank was whimpering miserably under the spruce tree.

"I thought you'd left me, boy. I thought you'd left me," he croaked.

Longfoot gathered him into his arms.

"I—I'm sorry I called you a half-breed," continued the old timber rat. "You're a white man, if ever there was one—and a damned good feller!"

## CHAPTER XXX

### MATTERS OF LIFE AND DEATH

THE Brindle had risen several feet since John Longfoot had come over this portage to Winnesago Lake several days before. The black-and-yellow stream was booming. And yet the timberman knew the river-bed was not beginning to carry off the amount of water that had fallen during the late spring.

He got the canoe launched in a quiet pool, placed the injured man in it without suffering an overturn, and then got in himself and gingerly guided the craft out into mid-flood.

Both he and his companion would have been much the better for a cup of coffee; but Longfoot's camp outfit had been left behind—burned, of course, in the Slabtown holocaust. Nor could he afford any delay by making camp.

There was menace in the voice of the river. A threat hung in the sky above the hill-tops—the threat of a cloudburst that would overwhelm all the small water-courses and feed streams and sweep out the “plugs” at their mouths.

Two miles below the portage the canoe passed a



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muddy flood pouring over a dam of brush and driftwood all of twenty feet high. This dam between two high banks held in leash, as Longfoot well knew, a lake covering several square miles of forest. Millions of tons of water would be added to Brindle River when this dam burst. And this was only one of many such stoppered brooks!

The roar of the main stream was in a savage strain. Even at the time of the early log-drives the current had not been so swift or boisterous.

Longfoot did not need to paddle, save to steer the canoe. The current flung the light craft on faster than any human arm could speed it.

It did not rain now—not here on the river. But the thunder muttered almost continually among the hills. Or was it thunder? Could it be that the dams were bursting up there with such tremendous reports? Were the “plugs” of stream after stream being blown out by the increased pressure behind them? The level of the Brindle seemed to have risen since they started!

Had Longfoot obtained the help of the gang he had hoped for at Slabtown they might have been too late to avert the calamity which he had already apprehended. The flood was on its way. Devastation was already rushing down from the hills.

And surely Steve M’Graw and his party from Tall Timber Junction would not be in season to do any good. They could scarcely have reached Paradise Knoll by this hour. No chuck raft could be

poled up the Brindle, and there was no open wagon road following either bank of the river. As an army must travel on its stomach, so must a gang of rivermen.

Crukshank roused now and then to groan, and cough, and beg for water. Longfoot did not have even a bottle of oil with which to annoint the man's burns. Patches of his clothing had been seared away completely, and the raw, scorched flesh was exposed.

Longfoot desired to speed down the stream as much for his companion's sake as to warn the people below that the flood was coming. For that it was coming, he was confident. He feared, indeed, that it might overtake him and the injured man. It was only a matter of hours at the most before the freshet would sweep through the valley of the Brindle.

The river current offered peril in every canoe-length. Not only were timbers and other culch dragged from the flooded shores, or spewed out of the smaller estuaries, threatening to batter the craft; but the channel was full of snags and sharp boulders; and there were whirlpools and eddies that tried their very best to suck the craft under.

The timberman might well be sharp-eyed and wary. A twist of the paddle often carried the craft but a hand's span clear of catastrophe.

Once he had to run his bark into a quiet pool along shore and get out to stretch his cramped limbs. He lifted out Crukshank, too; but the old

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man by this time had become light-headed. He only muttered and chuckled to himself in a foolish way. Once Longfoot caught:

"They've got my record at Leavenworth—that tells the story. Hen Stafford wasn't so smart as he might ha' been. He never thought o' that—never!"

"What has he got on his mind, I wonder?" Longfoot murmured. "He spoke of Stafford before. That girl from New York gave me the right steer, I do believe. He knows something that might help us save Gypsy her fortune from the maw of that derved timber corporation. But suppose the poor old rascal dies?"

He emptied the canoe of water, returned the sacks for Crukshank to lie on, and lifted him in. Again Longfoot sat in the stern and the voyage was continued.

Not for an instant could he take his eyes from the current and its dangers. Once they shot into a backwater, darted upstream in a lane between two walls of rock, and only by good fortune and keen management did he halt the canoe before it plunged its nose into a boom-log caught across the narrow estuary, and over which a foot of brown water poured.

He got out of that pocket most carefully, and thereafter was sure to keep to the middle of the river.

At one point the bank on the west side of the stream was low and rich bottom-lands spread for a

mile or more to the house of a deep-wood farmer. That bottom-land, which had been a smiling young cornfield when he had gone north the week before, was now under water. He could just glimpse the farmhouse roof above the flood.

It was between the high bluffs, however, that the height of the water was most plainly disclosed. All along these higher banks boulders were being under-washed by the stream, and now and then fell into the bed with a mighty splash. It was perilous to approach the shore at all while shooting between these miniature canyon walls.

Midday came and went, and in spite of Long-foot's hardy training and his great powers of endurance, he felt himself becoming exhausted. He was parched for thirst, for the muddy river water was not fit to drink; and he had already pulled his belt to the last notch to quench his stomach's craving for food. He had not eaten since his hurried meal at Tall Timber Junction the previous afternoon.

Not a soul had he seen along the river banks; not a sign of Steve M'Graw and his crew, of course. His warning to the Junction people, he feared, had been too late after all. There was not time now to avert the catastrophe of a veritable deluge. All that he could do was to warn the Junction people and those lower down the river to flee from the wrath of the waters.

If he could get there in time! That was the

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thought that seared his mind from minute to minute. Could he beat the flood to the Junction? Could he get there far enough in advance of disaster to wire word of what was coming to the towns and mill sites, as well as the farms, below?

He was coming into more familiar territory now. These banks had been his hunting grounds since childhood. There had been an old Indian, Neonah, Bobolink's grandfather, who had taught him to make and string his first bow, and when John Longfoot was able to send a blunt shaft across the Brindle at this particular place, Neonah had pronounced his education in that line complete.

This spot was just above Paradise. Longfoot peered far ahead as the canoe swept around the turn, and the wide, straight reach at the foot of the knoll where Gypsy lived was revealed to him.

That long look was fatal. There was danger near at hand which for once he did not see. A snag, weaving back and forth just at the surface, caught the canoe. It was the sharp, hardened branch of a dead tree that had fallen into the river, but still remained attached to the bank.

The point of hard wood ripped a slash along the side of the canoe, barely above the water line, and all of two feet long.

A chance dip of the canoe sideways, and the water washed through the slit and settled the craft to a level at which the seepage became continuous.

He must halt his journey. That slit must be repaired before he went farther.

He knew this locality so well that before half a bucket of water had leaked in, he made a landing under the bank on the Paradise side of the river. But while he lifted Crukshank out of the frail craft, a second disaster came.

The current swirled suddenly inshore. It seized the lightly grounded canoe and, as it was lightened of its human burden, it was swept high off the strand and whirled away. The slit now took in no water, for the canoe floated light as a cork.

Had Longfoot been unhampered by the now unconscious old man he might have secured the canoe before it really got away. But he could not drop Crukshank on the rocks.

He saw the canoe's departure with troubled brow. What now? How should he go on with his message of coming peril, and while he had this half lifeless man on his hands?

Crukshank was past begging him not to leave him. Whatever had happened to the old man internally, it was fast sapping his life. And yet, John believed Crukshank might be saved if he could get Doctor Hewitt to him.

It was twelve miles and more to the Junction. He could not travel that distance with this burden in his arms. Nor would Longfoot abandon the old man.

He thought suddenly of Gypsy and her pony. If she was at home up there, he could send her on horseback to the endangered town more swiftly than he could travel himself. And, in addition, there would be shelter and care for Crukshank at the lodge until the doctor could arrive.

The thought fathered instant action. Longfoot clambered up the bank, carrying the old man, and hurried up the slope through the maple wood to Paradise. Before he reached the summit of the hill Aunt Tabby spied him and ran out.

"True word! Whatever is the matter, Johnny Longfoot? Who have you got there? What has happened?"

"This fellow is hurt—burned bad. He was burned up there at Slabtown——"

"Slabtown!" repeated the old woman. "Then what's he doin' down here? And you, too?"

"He is here because there isn't any Slabtown left," explained Longfoot. "Wiped out, Aunt Tabby—complete! The rest of 'em got away by train. I came down with this man in my canoe. But I lost the canoe just above Paradise.

"You look out for him, Aunt Tabby, while we get word to Doc Hewitt. And the Junction folks have got to be warned that the flood is coming."

"I knowed it! I felt that we was goin' to have more than usual dampness around here, my old knees ached so. True word! Bring that man in

here and lay him on Si's bed. He's a sight, ain't he?"

"Where's Gypsy?" demanded John.

Aunt Tabby pursed her lips. "Well, she ain't here just at this minute. An' I can handle this bag o' bones my own self, I should hope. I don't need no one to help me."

"But I want Gypsy to mount her pony and ride to town. I can't make it with my game leg."

"She's gone for a walk," said Aunt Tabby. "But I expect you can use Kitsy."

"I'd look nice on that pony, wouldn't I? I'd break its poor back inside of two miles," and John stormed out of the house.

But the old woman ran after him.

"John! If the Junction is goin' to be under water, sure 'nough, you go to the hotel and tell Sissy Boggs—I mean Mrs. Lemoyne—and her daughter to get a turnout from Bill Brock and bring their trunks and all right up here to Paradise. That flat land won't be no place fitten for them in a flood. You hear me, John?"

He waved his hand in understanding and went on around the house. The river route to Tall Timber Junction was closed to him. There was no canoe to be had. And Gypsy's mare was too light to carry the bulk of the timberman.

Then he saw Harvey Stafford's big bay standing hitched by the gate. John knew immediately why



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Gypsy was not at home. She had gone for a stroll with the A.C.T.C. president.

But the discovery of the bay horse was the most important thought in John's mind at that moment. Here was a way to reach town almost as quickly as he might have had the canoe not failed him.

He ran across the garden, untied the horse, and leaped into the saddle as the bay whirled, snorting. Down the path through the pines he urged the beast, lying low along his neck.

He flashed past the clearing of the three old men, shouting as he went:

"The flood is coming! Old Brindle's on the rampage!"

The high water was not likely to reach the Break-away; yet at each little farm on his way down the valley Longfoot shouted a similar warning.

Stafford's mount was a blooded animal, with spirit and bottom. But possibly he had never been ridden so hard before.

His flanks were wet and his barrel was heaving when, with nose outstretched and his hoofs spurning the dust, John rode him into Railroad Avenue.

"The flood! The water is coming! Get ready to leave!" the timberman shouted.

He pulled in the horse at the railway station. The station master ran out upon the platform.

"It's coming!" John announced. "Wire to your supervisor for a special train. The women and children should be got out of town at once. You're

going to be smothered here in a few hours—water to the eaves!"

He rode on to the hotel. People were beginning to run out into the street. Mrs. Guffey, with her guests and the hotel help, crowded to the front porch.

"Pack up, Mrs. Guffey, and prepare for a mighty wet time," John shouted to the hotel's mistress. "The river's rising. You'll soon have more water in your hotel than if the County had gone for prohibition!"

Then he spied Mrs. Lemoyne, horror-stricken and visibly trembling at the news.

"Miss Murdock says for you and Miss Lemoyne to get a wagon from the livery stable and pack your trunks and yourselves into it and go up to Paradise. It will be dry up there, all right. She urges you to come," Longfoot told the woman.

"Mr. Longfoot!" screamed Grace suddenly. "That's Harvey's horse!"

"I borrowed it," explained the timberman, as the girl ran to the side of the panting creature.

"But what's happened to Harvey? Where is he?" she asked with anxiety.

"I found the horse at Paradise. Stafford was off with Gypsy somewhere," was the hasty reply. "I've got to find Doc Hewitt."

He gathered up the reins again; but Grace seized them with a desperate and angry clutch.

"You mean to say he has gone back to that girl

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again? We have just ridden in from there. Do you mean to say——”

“Well, Miss, that’s where I got the horse,” Longfoot said, not much interested at the moment in her troubles.” “I want to see the doc——”

“Wait!” commanded Grace, panting, her eyes almost black with the rage that possessed her and her face aflame. “You are interested in what I have to say, I *know*, John Longfoot. You love that Patterson girl.”

She made the statement boldly, searching his face with burning gaze. After all, John Longfoot was human. His countenance betrayed more than he would have desired to show the world—especially this angry and spiteful young woman.

“Harvey is cheating you, too,” she cried, under her breath. “He is determined to marry that girl. Oh, not for her beauty and rarity, you may believe!” scoffed Grace. “But for her fortune.”

“Her fortune, Miss Lemoyne?” repeated Longfoot, recovering more composure. “That is scarcely possible under the circumstances.”

“Oh, yes it is!” she cried. “I know he fears the corporation’s position in the matter of those Patterson timber claims may be untenable. If he can marry that girl he will control her interests, and the A.C.T.C. will be saved from disaster. Don’t you see?”

But John Longfoot had other and more imminent

matters to attend to just now. He twitched the reins from her grasp with some abruptness.

"I cannot talk to you now, Miss," he declared. "There are more serious things afoot than your jealousy suggests—matters of life and death."

He wheeled the horse and rode for Doctor Hewitt's office.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE SOUND OF MANY WATERS

It was because Gypsy had been so abrupt with him and refused to discuss her business affairs while the Lemoynes were at Paradise that Harvey Stafford had returned from the Junction after escorting the two New York women to the hotel.

He had ridden away with their mounts to Bill Brock's paddock behind the livery stable, and Grace had supposed, until she saw John Longfoot riding the big bay, that Stafford was somewhere about the town. Instead, he had ridden the twelve miles again to Paradise at a pace which had ill-prepared the bay horse for the speed Longfoot later got out of him.

Harvey Stafford was vastly disturbed regarding Gypsy and her affairs. If he did his best by the corporation and for his own pocket, the woods girl was bound to suffer. She had confessed to him that she would be penniless. Yet what a proud tilt there was to her little chin when she had refused his "charity"!

Stafford's thoughts were riotous as he rode. He had come to a point where he acknowledged but one

desire—and a consuming one. This wish of his heart burned away all the dross of his nature. He wished for Gypsy—and not as he had longed for a woman before!

His enjoyment of Grace Lemoyne's personality, of her bright chatter, of her originality, of her beauty, was quite as great as ever it had been. But there was something in Harvey Stafford's nature that the more artificial girl did not satisfy.

In Gypsy's personality the man found that which he desired—that which had been lacking in every other woman whom he had known. He rode up to Paradise now with the determination to offer this girl of the wild wood his name, his fortune, his heart!

He would marry Gypsy Patterson.

Nor did his business difficulties over the Patterson claims enter into this thought of Gypsy at all, Grace's declaration to Longfoot to the contrary notwithstanding.

That winsome little water sprite—that wood nymph—danced in his vision all the way: As he had first seen her shooting the rapids of the Brindle—a vivid, sprightly figure with muscles of steel and the cool brain of a practised riverman! Again as she lurched precariously upon the side of the cliff after the landslide that had marooned her there—unafraid and merry.

Then, how she had cast herself into his arms

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and he had held her against his breast for that precious moment that he never would forget! Again, as he had seen her at Paradise, where she had strolled through the wood with him; and of late as she bestrode the brown pony, riding before him like the wind, racing to the railroad station at Tall Timber.

On this very day had Gypsy not revealed herself in still another guise? Grace Lemoyne had insisted upon visiting "the wild girl in her lair"; but who was this courteous, well-dressed hostess—a veritable chatelaine of the manor—who had met them at the Patterson lodge and made them welcome? Aside from the ridiculous revelation of her mother's early experiences in Tall Timber, Grace could scarcely have kept up her assumed superiority over the Paradise girl. At heart Gypsy was Miss Lemoyne's superior, for she had charity.

This was Harvey Stafford's great hour. He had thrown aside old thoughts, old opinions, old and vicious desires. And his spirit leaped ahead to meet Gypsy again faster than the big bay could carry his body over the road which had now become so familiar.

He once more tied the horse to the post outside the garden gate, and crossed to the house. The sun was westering, but was still well above the tree-tops. Gypsy and Aunt Tabby were sitting on the front porch together, earnestly talking.

"Mr. Stafford!" exclaimed Gypsy, rising in surprise. "What has happened?"

"True word!" gasped Aunt Tabby. "Anything the matter with Sissy Boggs?"

"Something has happened to me," replied Stafford, almost boyishly. "I've got to tell you, Miss Gypsy."

"It ain't serious, is it, Mr. Stafford?" asked the old woman. "I've got mint, and thoroughwort, and some other simples, in the house. I can stew you up something warming."

"I assure you, Miss Tabby," Stafford said, "my health was never better. But I have something very serious to say to Miss Gypsy."

"Let us walk down to the river, Mr. Stafford," broke in the girl, suddenly in a flutter. "I'll be back in time to pick over those early berries for supper, Aunt Tabby."

"And I'll make a cake if Mr. Stafford will stop," declared the generous and hospitable old woman.

"You couldn't drive me away without supper, Miss Tabby," he said over his shoulder as the girl and he departed.

Since the visitors from the Junction had gone, Gypsy had changed to her usual out-of-door garments, and she now wore strong, laced boots. She set a brisk pace until they were well out of earshot of the house and on a downhill slant.

"Nothing really has happened, of course?" she asked curiously.



"In what way?"

"To Mrs. or Miss Lemoyne, I mean."

"Oh, I saw them safely home," he laughed. "But I wished to say something privately to you."

"I wish we might drop business matters, Mr. Stafford," she said firmly. "I want to talk to the Uncles-all and—and other friends first."

"Nothing of a business nature has brought me back," he said quickly. "Nothing like that!"

"Oh!"

"Money matters are always my bane. I wish I lived altogether the simple and happy life you people of the tall timber live."

"I am afraid it would bore you very soon," Gypsy observed gravely.

"I would like to have a place just like this," he said, glancing back at the rustic lodge. "On a hill like your house, for instance. A big, comfortable place with verandas all around and an open fireplace in every room. I'd spend half my time here."

She looked at him, startled, and with something cold and doubtful in her glance. Was he thinking of the time when she would be driven out of Uncle Si's beautiful old lodge and Stafford's corporation was in possession of these timberlands?

"It would be great!" added the man, with that same boyish manner that scarcely seemed to become him.

"Just what did you have to tell me, Mr. Staf-

ford?" Gypsy interposed, her voice bringing him sharply to himself.

He looked down into her face with a direct smile, for he saw that she did not understand him. His hand reached for hers and embraced it in his larger palm. The girl suddenly began to flush and tremble.

"Gypsy," he said, "I could spend much more than half of each year here for the sake of being with you. I want you, my dear!"

"Mr. Stafford!"

"I would give you all you possibly could desire of the outside world—Europe—the Antipodes if need be—all the travel you long for. And then we would come back to Paradise for peace and real enjoyment.

"Since knowing you—since coming to Tall Timber—I've gained an understanding of an existence that I never appreciated before. I want it for my own. And I want you, Gypsy, to share life with me, both here in Tall Timber and in the larger world outside."

"Mr. Stafford!" gasped the girl, shrinking from him almost in fear. "What are you saying to me?"

"I am asking you, Gypsy, to be my wife," he said more simply. "Will you marry me?"

"Oh, Mr. Stafford!"

He waited, gazing smilingly down into her uplifted eyes. There was an assurance in his man-

ner, and yet a humbleness that was not quite natural to the Harvey Stafford she had known heretofore.

In their ears thundered the rising waters of the Brindle. They continued to walk toward the bank of the boisterous stream while talking, and even now when she hesitated—searching her heart for the right answer—they still approached the river.

Indeed, Stafford had been obliged to raise his voice to a more than conversational tone to enable Gypsy to hear his words clearly. But he was so much in earnest that he scarcely appreciated the incongruity of this love-making at top-pitch.

"What do you say to me, my dear?" he urged. "Think of what I have to give you—of how happy we can be. Wealth and position may not be the best things in the world, but they are a great help. And we can always come back to Paradise!"

"Mr. Stafford—Harvey!"

They had reached the brink of the river and could overlook its turgid waters. In coming down the knoll they had headed southward and were now well down toward the overlook opposite the gash in the west bank of the stream where John Long-foot's cabin stood.

The roar of the waters was so savage that at this first sight of the stream both Gypsy and her companion halted abruptly to look. It was of so wild and threatening an aspect that even their thoughts

were turned from the enthralling subject in both their minds.

Stafford still held her hand. His influence over the girl for the moment was supreme. In Gypsy's mind had risen the vision of a future that promised so much that she longed for in life. A cultivated existence, the excitement of social life, broadening experiences, travel—the expansion of that part of her nature which she felt to be cramped by the environment of Tall Timber.

John and the gift which he had not given her and his deficiencies as a lover were in keen comparison with Harvey Stafford and what he had to offer. Gypsy's lips parted. She smiled ravishingly. Her gaze was about to be withdrawn from the roistering river to rest again on Stafford's face.

But there was something adrift in the stream. She saw it shoot out into mid-channel and spin there for a minute quite bewilderingly.

"See!" Gypsy cried.

"What is it?" rejoined the startled Stafford, as she quickly withdrew her hand from his grasp and leaned forward the better to look up the river.

"A canoe—and it is empty!"

"I see it. Has there been an accident, do you suppose?"

"I—I don't know. I fear—Why, it is John's canoe!"

"Whose?"

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"John Longfoot's," gasped the girl, and as the empty canoe whirled past them in the channel she started to run with it.

"Oh, damn that half-breed!" ejaculated Harvey Stafford.

She did not hear him. Her eyes were fixed on the bobbing canoe and at the target painted on the bow which had identified it for her. Stafford could not keep up with her unless he ran; and he would not do that. He strode behind, swearing under his breath, hotly outraged by the unforeseen incident that had arisen.

John Longfoot was forever popping up between them. The fellow betrayed him often and again into a mood that he did not wish Gypsy to observe. He strode on, seething in his own futile rage.

Now that the canoe was empty, it seemed charmed. It dodged all obstructions as though there was a spirit hand steering it. Swiftly it threaded the tortuous channel between the almost hidden boulders.

They came in sight of the pool below Longfoot's cabin. Here a dam of logs and lighter flotsam had formed more than half way across the river. It was where John had held his big drive over one night at the time he had saved Bobolink from drowning.

There was a channel between this dam and the farther shore; and through that passage, and around

the logs, the water foamed madly. The canoe was flung—yet lightly withal—upon one of the half submerged logs. It lodged there, its stern swinging to and fro in the current.

"Oh, I can get that! I'll get it out for John! Where can he be?" Gypsy cried, starting to climb down to the shore.

Stafford had overtaken her. He seized her wrist, and there was a mandatory tone to his voice that she had never heard before:

"Don't do that!"

"Why, yes. I must save John's canoe. He would do the same for me."

"Damn that half-breed! I want you to forget him," said Stafford harshly. "I want you to listen to me, Gypsy."

"Some other time, Mr. Stafford," she said slowly, exerting some effort to withdraw her wrist from his grasp. "I must save the canoe now. You do not understand. We woods people have to help each other. I can't imagine how that canoe came down here. Where can John be, I wonder?"

"Look here, Gypsy, this isn't your business!" Stafford said roughly. "And I wish you would not continue to catalogue yourself with these back-woods people. You are of them but not like them."

"I am one of them!" exclaimed Gypsy, in some warmth. "And John Longfoot——"

"Let that half-breed attend to his own affairs.

He is making enough disturbance around the Junction, as it is. I had to threaten even my mill bosses with dismissal and a general shut-down of the mills to keep the men at work after Longfoot had stirred them all up yesterday about this silly flood."

"What do you mean, Mr. Stafford?" she gasped.

"And I did discharge that M'Graw fellow," went on the man, unwisely enough, now that his temper had seized the bit. "He is a friend of yours, too, I presume."

"Steve? Yes, Mr. Stafford," said Gypsy, "Steve is my friend. Why was he discharged?"

"Because he insisted upon taking orders from Longfoot instead of from me."

"He is one of John's foremen in the winter," explained Gypsy.

"He is nobody's man now!" snapped the angry Stafford. "He insisted upon trying to gather a gang to go up river and clean ditches, or some such foolishness. Just because Longfoot is crazy enough to believe some extra water is coming down this stream."

"Where did John go?" demanded Gypsy.

"Back to Slabtown. To try to get men there for his crazy enterprise of cleaning the brooks. But I put a spoke in his wheel. I wired our superintendent there to pay off the mill hands several days ahead of time, and there couldn't have been a sober man in Slabtown by this morning."

He laughed harshly. She was still looking at

him—studying him—reading his rage-blotched features as though he were a stranger to her. And, indeed, this Harvey Stafford was a stranger. Never before had Gypsy seen this side of the man's nature.

"Stop, Mr. Stafford!" she said quietly. "I do not wish to hear any more. You hurt me cruelly."

"Hurt you?"

His countenance changed slowly. He tried to recover his composure. He suddenly realized what he had done, and he would now have given anything to recover his place in her estimation. But that he could never do.

"You hurt me because I see that you are not the man I thought you," the girl said briefly. "Because you do not like John Longfoot, you thwarted his endeavor to save property—perhaps lives—in the valley below. For, if John says the flood is coming, it will come."

She left him abruptly and went down the bank. He shouted after her:

"Gypsy! Come back! You'll be hurt!"

She kept on without noticing him and leaped upon the first log.

"My God, girl, come back! Never mind that canoe. It's not worth risking your life for."

Perhaps she did not hear him now at all. The sound of the waters seemed to be increasing from moment to moment.

Gypsy wore no calks in the soles of her boots,



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and could not, therefore, get a grip upon the log as the rivermen do. But she went on courageously, nevertheless.

"Come back! Never mind that damned canoe!" begged Stafford at the top of his voice. "I'll buy Longfoot another—a dozen! Don't risk your life, Gypsy!"

She did not as much as glance at him. The man stood helplessly on the bank watching her leap from log to log. She had eyes only for the logs ahead of her—and for John's canoe.

Higher and higher rose the voice of the waters. From a distance a tremendous roar thrummed upon Stafford's ears. It seemed as though some prehistoric monster, such as man never saw, was coming down the deep bed of Brindle River, roaring a savage pæan as it came.

The man must have understood what was at hand had he not been so enthralled by what the girl was doing. As for Gypsy, she was so close to the roaring stream that her ears were closed to the greater sound from up river.

She made her way swiftly, yet with caution, toward the far side where the canoe had grounded. She could see the paddle in it; therefore, she thought, there had probably been no accident.

The craft must have merely drifted away from some landing John had made—if it was John who had launched the canoe in Brindle River. And

where was that landing? Surely not far above Paradise. The canoe could not have drifted far in the boisterous stream without coming to disaster.

With these thoughts uppermost in her mind, Gypsy reached the canoe. It was an easy matter to push it off. She saw the slit in the side; but the canoe had not shipped much water.

At that moment something startled her. She stood up, flashing a glance from shore to shore. Stafford stood with arms outstretched to her, calling her back. But she could not have heard his voice had she so desired.

Above all other sounds now—shaking the very heavens it seemed with its thunder—rose the mighty voice of the waters. The freshet was coming!

Gypsy shook the spray from her eyes and glanced upstream. A cloud seemed to overhang the river. Then the turn in the bank far up the river was blotted out.

A rolling wave—perhaps twenty feet high—filled the tunnel of the river from bank to bank!

Majestically it rolled downward, the spray of its coming flying far up the steep banks, its forefront a mass of yellow foam streaked with ugly black. Such an appalling sight Gypsy had never before seen.

She glanced again from side to side, thinking only of escape. Stafford, too, saw the mighty

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wave. He was staring, open-mouthed, at the phenomenon of such a flood as he had never dreamed of.

The west shore of the river was much nearer to the girl. She stepped lightly into the canoe, seized the paddle, and drove the craft toward the mouth of the gash in which John Longfoot's cabin stood.

Stafford tore his gaze from the advancing wave to watch the girl's seemingly reckless action. Did she mean to shoot the channel between the log-dam and the farther shore, and go downstream ahead of the flood? Knowing her spirit, the man would not have been surprised had Gypsy attempted this feat.

But the girl knew what the rolling wave would do better than did Stafford. She realized how swiftly it was traveling. She could only save her own life and—possibly—John's canoe.

She leaped ashore and drew the canoe out of the stream. The tremendous voice of the waters shook the air like the reverberations of heavy thunder. Gypsy turned the canoe over, stooped and got under it, and so lifted it on her strong shoulders, staggering up the path towards John's house.

The yellow-and-black wave, typical of the Brindle, burst into the wider pool at the mouth of the gash, spread over the dam of driftwood, and surged up both banks.

Stafford found himself knee deep in the flood.

But he did not move. His entire attention was fixed upon Gypsy on the other side of the river.

The foaming, angry flood poured up the gash, filling it from side to side. It swirled about the girl with the canoe on her shoulders. For a moment Stafford feared the water would rise high enough to bear Gypsy away.

But she staggered on to safety. She reached the old frame cabin.

Stafford's arms dropped to his sides again. Suddenly he had become very weary. The turgid river, deep and thunderous, separated him from Gypsy. But more than that barred him from the woods girl. There was a great gulf fixed which Harvey Stafford could never again span.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### PRIMEVAL PASSIONS

LEFT to herself Mrs. Lemoyne would never have thought of accepting Aunt Tabby's invitation to return to Paradise. Cecelia Boggs Lemoyne desired no more than her daughter to hark back to those early days when she had been a "biscuit-shooter" in Shattuck's eating house at Blainesburg, and had served, with Tabitha Murdock, the rough timbermen of that generation.

But Grace had thrown to the winds every other thought save her determination to thwart Harvey Stafford and Gypsy. Stafford was at Paradise now. He must remain there, as Longfoot had taken his horse. If the flood that was prophesied came and overwhelmed the plain on which Tall Timber Junction stood, of course Stafford would remain in the hills.

The promise of a train to take the population out of danger did not appeal to Grace. She ran to the livery stable and arranged for a pair of horses and a wagon, and a driver as well, to transport her mother and herself with their trunks to Paradise. In twenty minutes they were off for the Breakaway

trail—one of many vehicles hurrying out of town, away from the flood. Doctor Hewitt was urging his horse on ahead of the Lemoynes. John Longfoot, having done all he could for the threatened lowland dwellers, rode slowly behind upon Stafford's big bay.

The sun had set when they arrived at Paradise. The physician, reaching his destination much before the visitors, had examined the injured Crukshank and made him as comfortable as possible. But the old timber rat was indeed in serious condition.

When John Longfoot reached the lodge the doctor was about to depart.

"You put yourself out a heap, John," the rough-spoken medical man said, "for a pretty useless critter. And he's near all in, at that. I told him where he was—where you had brought him clear from Slabtown—and all the old fool could do was to chuckle and say you'd brought him to what was once his own home. You and I both know, John, that Si Patterson built this house himself and that probably this maple timber was government land before Si filed claim upon it."

"But did Si file his claims, or otherwise get legal possession of his timberlands?" said Longfoot anxiously. "That is what we want to find out, Doc, or Gypsy is going to lose everything we thought was coming to her."

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"Those blamed timber thieves!" growled Hewitt. "I wish this H. Harvey Stafford was lying right here where old Ben Crukshank is. I'd get the truth out of him!"

Just where Stafford was at this moment was puzzling Grace Lemoyne. She could not find out from Aunt Tabby—who considered it a very private matter—where the man and Gypsy had gone.

The burst of sound when the flood wave swept down the river had been but faintly heard by those coming up the Breakaway, for the ridge smothered the roar of it; and Aunt Tabby had been too busy with the injured man and with her supper preparations to give a mere freset any attention.

What had become of Harvey Stafford "and that girl"? Grace could think of nothing but this query. She did not even thank Aunt Tabby for her generous invitation that had brought her mother and herself to Paradise to escape the flood. Grace ran out of the house and looked all about the premises for the absent couple.

The bay, with his bridle off, was eating oats out of a box that Longfoot had brought from Kitsy's stable. The timberman had treated the horse well on the back trail, and he had recovered his wind and spirit.

Here came Stafford at last—and alone! He came through the wood over the ridge, deliberately avoiding observation from the windows of the

house. He cut the weeds as he passed with vicious strokes of his riding whip. His countenance was marked by passion.

He crossed the garden, passing Aunt Tabby's rose bush at the corner of the lodge where John had dropped the locket. He reached the gate and his horse before he saw Grace at all.

"Good God!" he exclaimed bitterly. "Are you here again?"

"As you are, Harvey," said the girl, her eyes ablaze. "We both seem to find an enthralling interest in this place—or is it the people who live here who draw us so?"

"Your mother——"

"Oh, mother is here, too," she said clearly. "Indeed, we are all here—quite a week-end party. It seems the Junction is flooded—or about to be, and we all have escaped to the hills. Quite wonderful, isn't it?"

He had jerked up the bay's head and slipped the bit into the animal's mouth. He did not even look at her now.

"You have no idea," Grace went on in her low but penetrating voice, "what a really wonderful man our friend John Longfoot has proved to be."

"That half-breed?"

"Yes. He brought the news of the coming flood to the valley. He came down the river in his canoe, risking his life all the way, racing the flood, and



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brought an injured man with him. He had an accident near here, and carried his companion in his arms up here to the house."

"Humph!" ejaculated Stafford. "That's how his canoe came down this way."

"Did you see it? Quite remarkable, isn't it? These perfectly wonderful men of the tall timber! I am quite in love with them."

Stafford listened still without looking at her, buckling the bay's throat-latch.

"Think of Mr. Longfoot, with his injured leg, doing all that. Bringing that man with him clear from Slabtown. By the way, Slabtown is burned flat, Harvey."

"Slabtown! Our mill——?"

"Quite so. The A.C.T.C. is hitting hard going, isn't it? But John Longfoot got away from the fire with this old man. Once here, he mounted your horse and rode down to the Junction to warn us all of the flood and to get the doctor for the injured man."

"My horse?" exclaimed Stafford, flashing her a blazing look now. "He rode this horse?"

"Oh, yes. And brought him back again, as you see."

"He is here now? John Longfoot is here at Paradise?" snarled Stafford.

"He is," she said lifting her head and gazing into his angry eyes with no fear in her own. "He

is in the house at this moment. With that man he brought clear from Slabtown. And who do you suppose he is?"

He did not answer—he appeared stunned.

"The man you shipped to Slabtown to get out of the way. That horrible old Crukshank—the man whose evidence may bring all your plans, Harvey Stafford, to nothing!"

"Crukshank!" he repeated, aghast.

"That is the man. Mr. Longfoot saved his life. You can imagine how Crukshank looks upon his savior, Harvey—what he may tell him if he learns that half-breed, as you call him, is interested in the old Patterson claims. Think of it!"

"But Longfoot doesn't know anything about Crukshank!" ejaculated the president of the A.C.T.C., his mind reverting instantly to his business difficulties. "He must not know! We will get Crukshank away from here. I'll have him taken to the hospital at Blainesburg. Longfoot must not know——"

"But," said Grace, scarcely raising her voice and in bitter enjoyment of Stafford's chagrin, "he already does know."

"What do you mean?" cried the man wildly. "That Longfoot knows Crukshank's secret?"

"Yes. He knows that Crukshank's evidence can utterly smash all your plans, Harvey. For I told him!

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"I told him!" and now her voice rose sharply—a sign of coming hysteria. "You will rue the day, Harvey Stafford, that you fell under the influence of this Gypsy—this backwoods creature—this Girl from Nowhere!"

"Did you think for a moment that you could ignore me for Gypsy Patterson? Did you suppose I had followed you here to this awful place for the pleasure of seeing you waste your time and neglect your business interests for a girl like her?"

"You little fool!" exclaimed Stafford, beside himself with rage. "Do you mean to say you told that half-breed of Crukshank?"

"Yes, I did! And that half-breed will beat you now, and make you disgorge the timberlands, to control which you are willing to marry this Gypsy Patterson. You will gain nothing by marrying her now."

"Hush!" he commanded, as her hysterical tone rose. "Do you know what you have done?"

He seized her roughly by the shoulder; but she still stared defiantly into his eyes, suddenly shrieking:

"I have beaten you! Beaten you! I'll make you rue the day——"

"Hold your noise!" gasped Stafford. He seized her by the throat, bruising the delicate flesh, perhaps with the idea of stopping her clamor. She shrieked again—an ear-piercing, horror-shaken scream.

"You've ruined me!" he said harshly. "Your damned jealousy has cost the corporation half a million in timber—if *they find out!*"

With these last muttered words he flung the girl from him. She fell heavily and he turned to pull up the cinches of the saddle, his face black with wrath. Grace raised herself upon her hands, glaring and choking.

"You dog, you! You beast!" she panted. And then she shrieked a warning to him: "Look out, Harvey!"

Across the garden strode John Longfoot. His countenance was crimson with indignation. He vaulted the fence and approached Stafford just as the latter swung himself into the saddle.

"Get away from me, you damned half-breed!" snarled the city man.

"Yes," said John Longfoot, "some of my ancestors were savages; but they did not beat women."

He sprang after the mounted man. Stafford struck at him with his crop and a pale welt appeared across the timberman's neck. But as the horse wheeled, snorting with terror, John got a grip upon the pommel of the saddle.

He ran for a rod or two by the horse's side while Stafford sought to control his frightened mount. Then Longfoot leaped astride the horse, landing squarely behind Stafford.

He encircled the rider with his long arms. He tore the reins from his grasp. Then he cast him-

self, with Stafford in his arms, backward off the running horse.

They came to the pine tags heavily; but Longfoot rolled on top. Stafford had suffered a deep scratch across his brow, and it was bleeding; but his antagonist had not a mark as yet. Only his eyes, hard as jade, glowed like a wild beast's.

Stafford was no weakling. He broke free, rolled over swiftly, and both men came to their feet at the same moment. The city man put up his clenched fists in approved fashion. He could spar. John Longfoot crouched, his arms slightly spread for a grip around his opponent's body, for the timberman knew only the fighting methods of the lumber camps—the rough-and-tumble, catch-as-catch-can encounter that is possibly the most brutal way of fighting in the world.

He rushed Stafford, who met his charge with a straight left to the jaw that rocked John's head on his shoulders and drove him back a pace. But the pine tags were slippery under the city man's boots. He had no calks to help him secure a foothold. He was unable to follow up this first savage blow.

Nor did it seem to change John Longfoot's tactics. The timberman rushed again, and this time his long reach gave him the advantage.

He ducked under Stafford's blow. He wrapped his arms about the man's body and jerked him from

his feet. With a heave that tossed Stafford into the air like a bull tossing a victim, Longfoot threw the other completely over his head.

He whirled where he stood as Stafford sprawled—hands and knees—upon the ground, and cast himself upon him. But, despite the great shock of his overthrow Stafford was not helpless. He was not unfamiliar with wrestling, and these were the wrestler's tactics.

Stafford arched his back and braced legs and arms as he felt the timberman's weight upon him. Blood dripped into his eyes and from his lower lip which he had bitten. His face was more horrible than Grace had ever presumed Harvey Stafford's countenance could be.

The girl had risen and was clinging to the fence for support. She stared, enthralled, at the struggling men. She had never beheld such an exhibition of brute passion before. But she had dreamed of just such a fight!

Longfoot was trying to break Stafford's arch. Had he wished to use a foul blow—quite admissible in ordinary logging-camp fights—he could easily have whirled Stafford over on his back.

But suddenly the latter played a trick which gave him again all the advantage. He broke for an instant the stiff posture of his left arm and seized John's leg. It chanced to be the limb the timberman had so recently injured.

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A spasm of pain shot through Longfoot's body. It weakened him. He loosened his grip. Like a flash Stafford had whirled him over.

But the timberman's strength returned and he broke loose. They leaped to their feet again—panting, disheveled—breathing like men in a hard race, but both reasonably fresh.

Again John Longfoot crouched. Stafford was afraid of those long and powerful arms now. Hard as he was, he felt when John seized him that his ribs must crack.

Stafford fainted, lurching forward as though seeking to strike his opponent a fist-blow. John waited to receive it. The other dropped his head, plunged under John's guard, and smashed his crown into John's stomach with the force of a pile-driver.

It was a terrific blow—and a most foul one by all rules of civilized fighting. Yet John Longfoot, knowing only the fighting of the timber camps, did not for a moment think to cry "foul."

Nor did he have breath for that, or any other words. He doubled up at the blow, shielding his head as well as he might from Stafford's rain of fisticuffs. The city man beat him to the ground. He had the advantage, if only he had known how to use it.

The timberman covered his face with his arms to save his countenance from the boots of his opponent. That was instinctive. The logger's

calked soles can do awful damage to the unprotected face of a fallen enemy.

But perhaps Harvey Stafford shrank from such a brutal act. Or, perhaps, he did not think of it. He staggered back for a moment. He may have thought the fight finished—that John Longfoot had enough.

However, the timberman knew nothing about fighting save to win.

He lay on his back, his chest heaving, to recover his breath—but only for seconds. He rolled over, pluckily trying to climb to his feet. Had Harvey Stafford waited to deliver a straight fist-blow when the timberman rose, doubtless he could have knocked Longfoot out and won the victory.

Instead, he cast himself upon the hooped back of the fallen man. Longfoot braced himself and knelt, firm as a rock. He was getting back his breath now. New force flowed through his body. He waited, allowing Stafford to expend his own strength in seeking to turn him on his back again.

Once more the city man tried a foul. He thrust forward his right foot with the intention of stamping his heel upon John's right hand.

The latter saw the blow coming. He heaved himself back on his haunches and caught Stafford's two wrists with a grip of iron. The latter had overreached himself at last. John had him fast.

Tall as the latter was, Stafford was fully his



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equal in weight. Therefore the timberman lifted quite two hundred pounds across the small of his back as he slowly rose to his full height.

This was no quick, snappy heave, as the first had been. Slowly, but surely, Longfoot rose to his very toes, while Stafford kicked and struggled in a most futile way.

Then the woodsman stooped, and with his great shoulder and arm muscles flung Stafford high in the air and over his head. The victim turned a complete somersault, and this time, when he landed upon the ground, he lay still.

The fight had not been observed from the house. Only Grace was spectator. But as John Longfoot stood upright again, shaking the curls out of his eyes, he saw Bobolink running down through the trees and around the garden fence.

In John's ears, now that he could hear it, was the river's voice, more threatening it seemed than before. The face of the Indian lad was fairly gray with fear.

"Longfoot! Longfoot! Your house—him gone on flood!" yelled the boy.

"What's that?" ejaculated the timberman.

"River come—first time not fill gash. Then more flood—him fill gash. Him all washed out. Him carry away cabin."

"Bad luck," said John, shaking his head.

"More bad as that," cried Bobolink. "That

Gypsy squaw, him in Longfoot's house. Him gone down river, too!"

"Gypsy!" shouted John, in a great voice. "Not Gypsy? How came she on that side of the river?"

"Don't know. I see. Him house in river. Squaw in it all right. Ugh!"

The man waited to hear no more. He started with great strides up the hill. Passing the shed he reached in to where he knew it always hung and tore Si Patterson's peavey from its beackets. Then he strode on.

He glanced back once. Stafford had climbed to his feet. He was leaning on Grace who, in tears, was wiping the blood from his face with her handkerchief.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### IN THE GRIP OF THE FLOOD

WITH Bobolink loping behind him like a fox, John Longfoot strode over the crown of Paradise Knoll and down the steeper slope toward the river. The Brindle's voice was a deafening clamor. The timberman and the Indian boy had nothing to say to each other.

Grim of face, disheveled as he was after his fight with Stafford, the man was indeed a savage spectacle. Gypsy was in peril—deadly peril; and he thought now of nothing else.

It did not matter how she had crossed the river in full flood, or her purpose in doing so. She was in his cabin and the Brindle had floated it away.

John's French-Canadian forebears had built the cabin. It was no common log affair, but had a frame of adze-hewn timbers, locked at the corners and tree-nailed.

It might drift miles, even in such a flood as this; but it might, too, be soon wrenched to bits on some rock in midstream.

Longfoot had no idea of the height or condition of the river until he came in sight of it. The flood

was far up the gash—ten feet at least over the site of his cabin.

The current was a seething caldron of foam-streaked water and milling drift stuff. Great trees had been torn from their rootage and were whirling in eddies like chips in a millrace.

Even the clearer parts of the stream were dimpled with whirlpools that sucked down all the light culch that came within reach. To venture upon the stream in any kind of craft would be the height of folly.

Immediately upon reaching the bank of the river and seeing the desolation on the opposite shore, John Longfoot looked for the drifting cabin. Far down the stream was a bulky something; but the evening was already falling and he could not make out the object clearly before it sailed around the elbow above which was the site of the smothered "white water." There was no sign of the rapids now.

"It him!" yelled Bobolink, pointing to the disappearing object.

John could not hear the boy. He started along the bank at a heavy run, a pace that carried him swiftly over the rough ground, Bobolink loping along on his trail.

Running hard, they came to the elbow in the river. There was the object of their search drifting around and around in a deep pool under the opposite bank.

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The cabin had turned over on its side, the aperture where the chimney had torn away being uppermost. Out of this aperture, as John and his companion came into sight, crawled a grimy little figure like a chimney sweep, with a package held tightly under one arm.

"Gypsy!" roared the timberman.

His voice was drowned by the roaring of the flood. The river was strewn with logs and other rubbish, milling hither and yon. John leaped down to a ledge which was awash with the current.

A big log rocked in toward this landing. Vaulting with the help of his peavey, the timberman landed solidly upon the log, the chips flying from under his calks. The log rolled with him for a minute, but he soon steadied it, and, with a mighty thrust against another timber, sent the rude craft across the river toward the pool where the cabin slowly circled.

"Gypsy!" he shouted again, as he came nearer, and this time the girl, clinging to the cabin wall, heard and saw him. She waved a cheerful hand. It seemed as though no perilous situation could quench her spirit.

To shoot the timber down beside the floating house might have been possible. But how then take the girl ashore upon this awkward raft? And to desert the log himself and clamber up beside Gypsy would aid neither her nor the situation.

Another timber rammed the one John Longfoot

bestrode and almost pitched him off. He could not risk taking the girl on such a perilous voyage as this. In circling about in this great eddy at no time was the cabin within reach of the shore.

He leaped to a timber floating nearer to the bank. Above the pool was a huge tree with limbs that spread far out over the water. Its branches, tough and withy, drooped almost within reach of the drifting cabin.

John glanced from cabin to tree and measured the distance with a quick, sure eye. Then, with his peavey's aid, he leaped ashore.

He discarded his boots. He even unbuckled his belt and carried this in his clenched teeth as he climbed up the trunk of the huge tree.

Dark as it was growing now under the bank, Gypsy could see him. She stood up precariously upon the side wall of the circling cabin. She had tied her precious package about her neck.

Up to the biggest drooping limb the timberman climbed. Then out upon this and, head down, slid along a branch of it that almost touched the cabin.

"Ready, Gypsy?" he shouted, dangling the strap.

"Yes, John."

"Then grab hold and I'll lift you. You can climb back over my shoulders and get upon the limb above. Then I'll follow you and help you to the ground."

She seized the belt and he dragged her off the

drifting cabin. Then she climbed upon his shoulders and so up into the tree. With a twist and a heave, he swung himself back and followed her. In five minutes they sat astride the limb, facing each other, safe above the torrent that roared hungrily beneath them.

"Oh, John! you are so strong. You're wonderful!" Gypsy breathed. And then she giggled, for the thought came to her that that was just what Grace Lemoyne would have said.

"What's that?" he asked, pointing to the package she had clung to with such care.

"Your violin, John. I couldn't bear that should be lost."

"Good girl, Gypsy! And I feel like tuning up the old fiddle right here and now and playing a hallelujah. What a girl you are! It isn't safe any longer for you to travel around alone. Seems to me I'm always fishing you out of some trouble or other."

Sunset again at Paradise with all the heavenly glories spread in panorama before the Patterson lodge. The hush of midsummer now lay over all.

Here no reminder of the great freshet was visible. But at Tall Timber Junction and in the valley below the Brindle had strewn wreck and disaster that would long remain.

The American Consolidated Timber Corporation

had been the greatest loser because of the June flood. H. Harvey Stafford, it was said, had been forced to use a great part of his private fortune to bolster up the tottering credit of the timber corporation.

Every A.C.T.C. mill along the Brindle had gone out, and the millions of feet of timber had been carried to the Crow Wing and there salvaged for the most part by independent mills far down that stream.

This loss, with the disaster at Slabtown, had been a bitter blow indeed to the president of the timber corporation.

"He ought've gone to jail in the bargain," barked Neb Crane, fanning himself with his straw hat, as he perched with his two old chums on the edge of the lodge porch.

"Well, now, I don't know," wheezed Eben Stetter. "He's a game loser, after all. And the mills ain't all he's lost."

"Hi! Yi!" cried Crane. "I ain't got no sympathy for him—no, sir! What's he lost, anyway, but money?"

"Great Godfrey, man!" whistled Stetter, "don't you call that enough—him losin' a quarter of a million dollars' worth of timber?"

"You mean Si Patterson's claims that John says is all comin' to Gypsy, after all?"

"That's just what I mean."



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"True," said Crane thoughtfully. Then: "But he's got his gal. He didn't lose that Miss Grace. Likely gal, too, I say. Miss Tabby says her mother was up here to bid her good-bye, an' she said she was kind o' glad she an' Miss Grace come out here to Tall Timber after all. Harvey's goin' to marry Grace just as soon as he gets things straightened out about the timber claims."

"An' that won't be so soon," declared the fat man. "There's other claims besides Si's that are in doubt. Tall Timber is wakin' up, and the A.C.T.C. is neck deep in trouble."

"Well, I didn't think o' that," admitted Crane. "But it's all right about Gypsy's fortune—only it'll be more'n a quarter of a million. It'll be more'n three hundred thousand, all told. I wish you'd sometime get something right, Eben."

"It ain't, neither!" wheezed Stetter. "'Tis around a quarter of a million."

"It's three hundred thousand!" snapped Crane.

"You're both wrong, same as usual," suddenly interposed the cockatoo man, who had been figuring on the back of an old envelope. "It comes purty nigh to half a million. My soul, boys! The gal's rich!"

His mates grinned widely. Then Stetter said:

"It all come of that Benson—that four-eyed feller from St. Paul—always bein' in the way like John told him to, when Bob Larrabee tried to git

at the records to falsify them—the villain! If Larabee ever comes back to Tall Timber there ought to be a necktie party for him, an' don't you forgit it!"

He halted, quite breathless. But Crane eyed him scornfully.

"There you go again," he complained. "Sloppin' over same as always. It was the old dead-and-gone county clerk's widder comin' forward with Si Patterson's deeds that Si had left thirty years ago with her husban'—and had forgotten all about, 'tis likely—that cleared up Gypsy's troubles. John'll tell you so himself."

"You're wrong—both of you," croaked Killock. "That four-eyed Benson that John hired from the law firm in St. Paul did his share. And the old deeds might have helped if we'd had to go to court, 'stead of settlin' the business straight with Harvey Stafford."

"Well, what then?" demanded Stetter, getting red in the face.

"Hi! Yi!" cackled Crane. "What did fix the business?"

"It was Ben Crukshank. That old timber rat give John the right line before he passed away. He done one good deed, anyway, in his worthless life."

"You mean to say——" began the fat man.

"I never did know what Crukshank had up his sleeve," admitted Crane.

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"Why, his testimony wouldn't have been worth a dern in court, I don't suppose," said Killock. "If he had said there that he didn't ever own this piece of maple wood and Paradise Knoll that the corporation had a deed of, it wouldn't have helped Gypsy much—not just his say-so. He got money for it, and his name was on the deed. Stafford might have hollered 'Blackmail!' and got away with it."

"Well, then?" gasped Stetter.

"What of it?" asked Crane.

The man with the glass eye broke into a chuckle.

"It does beat all!" he said. "A villain almost always does overlook an important point. In makin' out them deeds coverin' all Si's holdings—and more—and recordin' them after the fire that burned up the old records, Henry Stafford and his pards got men like Crukshank to stand for their names being used, and all. They didn't even trouble to make all of 'em sign the papers. Stafford and his pards, it's likely, signed for 'em."

"Forgery!" wheezed Stetter.

"Derned thieves!" exploded Crane.

"Yes," agreed Killock. "But who was goin' to know it after the dummies had scattered and everybody had forgot? It was a sharp trick all right. Only, Henry Stafford overlooked one point about Crukshank, at any rate."

"Well, what was it?" demanded Stetter.

"For the lan's sake, tell it, Sam!" shouted Crane. "You're as long on wind as a brass band."

"Why, Stafford and his pards didn't know Ben Crukshank couldn't sign his name! He never learned to read or write till they put him in jail long after them timber deeds was on record."

"Hi! Yi!" cried Crane.

"What d'you think o' that?" wheezed Stetter.

"When John learned that, and got Crukshank's record from Leavenworth, all he had to do was to show his cards to Harvey Stafford an' Harvey threw down his own hand. It wasn't even good enough to bluff with. So, I says, it was Crukshank spoiled the A.C.T.C.'s batch o' dough and no mistake. John——"

"Yes—John!" repeated Stetter.

"Hi! Yi!" muttered Crane. "Better say 'John.' If it hadn't been for him we three old fools would ha' made a mess of things and no mistake. Gypsy would ha' lost her all, it's likely."

"Right you are for once!" exclaimed Sam Killock explosively. "The both of you!"

The train rocked easily over the well-ballasted bed, eastbound. The uneven rail joints and the second-class coaches of the branch road, all the discomforts of Tall Timber, and even Aunt Tabby Murdock's husk mattresses, were only memories.

Every turn of the drumming wheels took Mrs. Lemoyne and Grace nearer to the comforts and the luxuries of their urban life in the East. Grace sighed happily and turned a ring with a sparkling

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stone around and around on the third finger of her left hand.

In another section sat Harvey Stafford. His book had fallen unheeded in his lap. His gaze searched through the car window a landscape that was not visible to other eyes.

He looked older—yet he was more like the H. Harvey Stafford usually to be found at his desk in the private room in the New York offices of the American Consolidated Timber Corporation. These last few weeks had been a hard battle; they had taken something out of him.

It is a strong man who can come through defeat with as game a look as H. Harvey Stafford now had. And in his most sanguine moments the man could not claim that he had been victorious.

He had fought pluckily and had given ground point by point only when he realized that the enemy had worsted him. He had saved what he could for the corporation. He had compromised, and shifted ground, and changed his tactics, like the very excellent general he was.

But John Longfoot had beaten him. Stafford no longer recalled him as "that half-breed." He had measured strength both physically and mentally with the Man From Tall Timber, and in all honesty he was forced to admit that in both trials he had been beaten. John Longfoot had won.

Stafford had his memories, however. He would always have them.

He saw now as in a vision through the car window the sun setting before Paradise Lodge. In the golden glory of the sun's last rays a petite figure stood out clearly on the wide porch—the figure of a dream-girl he had known.

Something sweet and clean had come into H. Harvey Stafford's life with his acquaintance with Gypsy, and although he was leaving Tall Timber and her forever, that beneficent something would never wholly leave the man.

Grace rested a light hand on his shoulder, leaning above him.

"Penny for your thoughts, Harvey!" she whispered.

"I was thinking of you, my dear girl," he said, smiling blandly.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### PARADISE INDEED

BRINDLE RIVER had subsided to its usual summer bed, and slept in it. A stranger would never have dreamed that it could be such a brute of a stream as it had proved itself in June.

Only by the high water marks along the banks could one understand the power and depth of the flood that would long be remembered by the people of Tall Timber.

A man, coatless and without a hat, paddled a deep canoe up the tortuous channel of the stream, which now scarcely furnished in places sufficient depth for the craft to float. But above the stepping stones and under the high, steep bank below Paradise Knoll, the river spread into a deep and quiet pool.

He was a bronzed and thewy man, deep chested and long-armed, and with muscles that flowed under his shirt as he paddled like those of a panther. His keen face had a settled gravity upon it; yet there were tiny lines at the outer corners of his eyes which expressed good-nature, while the eyes themselves in repose were a soft and tender brown. A

violin case lay at his feet in the bottom of the canoe.

Suddenly, as he paddled, he spied a patch of white ahead of him upon the grassy bank under one of the huge old trees that were reflected in the pool. A single powerful stroke sent the canoe darting toward this shore.

The white patch stirred. He saw it now as the skirt of a frock that clung about a figure under a big parasol. The dark, piquant face of the girl was bent over a book. She looked like a veritable woods fairy that had alighted upon the river bank.

"Gypsy!"

She looked up. She spied him. All her grave attention for the book was gone in an instant.

"John!"

He held the canoe easily with the paddle over-side, and devoured her with his eyes.

"What do you think has happened?" she cried.

"The three old pards in the Breakaway have passed a waking hour together without quarreling," he promptly suggested.

"Oh, nothing like that," she laughed. "It's Anabelle and Steve. They are going to be married. She says she will shoot the last biscuit except to her husband, on Saturday night."

"That isn't exactly news," Longfoot said. "Steve told me. At least, he said something about 'putting his foot in it for fair' this time with Anabelle, so that there wasn't any chance of pulling it out again."



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"Horrid man!"

"Oh, I think Anabelle is quite the kind of girl Steve needs—he is so shy and backward. She'll put the fear of God in his heart and some extract of iron in his backbone—which last he needs."

"Won't you come ashore, John?"

"That is what I came for. I have to make a final report to the Uncles-all. Everything is all settled—it's all over but the shouting. You are a rich girl, Gypsy."

"Are you glad, John?" she asked, a little wistfully, for he had spoken with gravity.

"To be sure I am glad. Why shouldn't I be? It is great, Gypsy. You'll be a fine lady now."

"I shall just be Gypsy Patterson," she declared.

"But you can be a fine lady if you so desire."

"Ye-es. But, John!"

She hesitated and her pretty face grew downcast. He had stepped out of the canoe, lifting it to the narrow strip of sand. Now he climbed the bank to her side, bringing the fiddle-case with him.

"The dear old fiddle!" Gypsy murmured, patting the box with a tender hand. "And it might have been lost!"

"Only, thanks to you, it wasn't," he said, smiling down upon her.

"Sit down and play a bit, John," she begged. "I haven't heard the fiddle for ever so long."

He squatted, Turk fashion, at her feet and took

the instrument from its battered case. As he picked at the strings, tuning the fiddle, his brown eyes glowed warmly upon her. The moistened curls clung closely about his brow. His deeply bronzed skin was as smooth and clear as Gypsy's own. The healthy red tinged his cheek.

He began to play, haltingly at first, searching as he sometimes did for the motif to fit his mood. Suddenly he found it. The fiddle broke into a strain that Gypsy had never heard before.

She looked up at him again, startled. The flare in his eyes held her own gaze. She felt the thrill of his music as she had never felt it before. Something of the still untamed nature of John Longfoot reached out to her—seized upon her—influenced her as it never had previously influenced her.

This was not the hesitant, retiring woodsman whom she knew best. There was something commanding in his present look as there was in his music—something compelling. She was almost frightened by the surge of this new feeling which seemed to emanate from John Longfoot's personality.

The music broke off suddenly. She put out a firmer hand.

"No more, John," she said a little brokenly. "Help me up, please."

The fact that she craved such aid showed how Gypsy had been shaken. He leaped up, fiddle in

hand, and lifted her to her feet. In a moment she had recovered. She laughed a little trill—like a bird. She glanced down at her dress with pardonable pride.

"Isn't it pretty, John? Am I not a real lady now?" she asked with the sidewise tilt to her head.

"You look mighty fine," he admitted, the glow dying out of his eyes.

"I got it out of the catalogue. And it fits pretty well," she confessed. "But next year Aunt Tabby and I are going to the city and get ourselves a whole trunkful of what she calls 'boughten clothes'—going to pick 'em right off the store counters, John," with another trill of laughter.

"You certainly expect to have a good time with your money, Gypsy," he observed.

"I owe it all to you, John. I'd never have got my property if it hadn't been for you."

"Don't swell me all up, Gypsy. I own I was bound to beat Stafford if it could be done. When I stood in his office that time back there in the winter and he looked at me in that way of his—just as if I was dirt under his feet!—and said he didn't care whether you got your rights or not—well, something inside me said: 'Old fellow, you are backing the wrong game. I'm going to get you!'

"But I wouldn't have been able to do it," admitted John Longfoot, more modestly, "if I hadn't come across poor Crukshank and followed up what he told me. And, then, Benson helped a good deal.

Those records would have been changed to match the transcripts Stafford gave the old men, and that crooked county clerk would never have said boo.

"Stafford made a bad mistake in showing the transcripts first; but the Lemoynes were nagging him to finish his business and get away.

"Even your Uncle Si's old deeds, turning up as they did, would not have done much good, considering that the timber corporation's deeds had been filed so long without any objection being made. No. It was the Crukshank matter that played the dickens with Stafford's case. And he knew it just as soon as he saw I knew it.

"If we'd gone to court, the fact that the deed covering Paradise was a forgery would have cast doubts on all the other deeds. We had him——"

"*You* had him!" cried Gypsy, warmly.

"And now you are a great lady, or going to be just as soon as you get some money," he rejoined, and his voice fell.

She cast another birdlike glance at him. He had lost, as suddenly as he had gained it, all his recent confidence. She fumbled in a little vanity case that hung at her belt. She took out something that glittered.

"Do you really think that I look like a lady, John?" she asked roguishly. "How can that be? The dress? Yes. The parasol? Yes. This little 'thingumbobby,' as Aunt Tabby calls it, at my belt. But I wear no jewelry. Did you notice Grace Le-

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moyne's and her mother's? I have no jewels, John—no diamonds—no rings. I never had even a locket!"

A dull flush mounted into his face at that. She continued to look at him quite sternly. Really, he was abashed.

"Yes. You may well turn your gaze away. Hold that position, John, for a moment. There! Look at me now. Don't you think I am quite a finished picture?"

She had snapped the chain of John's gift about her neck. The pretty heart shaped locket with its flashing stone lay just below the soft hollow of her throat.

"Gypsy!" he almost shouted, starting forward. "Where did you get that?"

"Where you lost it, John," she rejoined demurely. "Don't you think it looks well on me?"

"But, girl——"

"Well, John?"

"I—I—I can't imagine how you found it."

"You did not think much of the locket, John," she said admonishingly and touching it lightly with her finger-tips. "You scorned it."

"Never!" he gasped. "I—I——"

"Well, John?"

"If I could only speak!" burst from his lips, almost in agony, and with a hopeless gesture.

She came close to him. She put her soft little

hand upon his arm, looking up into his passion-wrung features.

"Need you always be tongue-tied, John?" she whispered. "You can speak through the fiddle well enough."

"Gypsy!"

"Well, John?"

"You know I love you—I'm mad for you! Great heavens, girl, I can scarcely keep my hands off you right now! I want you—to know you are mine—and that nothing or nobody in this world can ever separate us."

"We-ell—John——"

"But—but I am a man with Indian blood in my veins. People sometimes look down on me because of it. Could—could you be the wife of a half-breed, Gypsy?"

"I could be the squaw of an Indian, John—if you were the Indian," she said softly, her eyes misty now, but looking at him unfalteringly. "Who am I, John Longfoot? A nobody—a waif—The Girl from Nowhere! So, perhaps," and both her voice and eyes fell, "you do not think so much of me on that account?"

"Gypsy! What are you saying? I could think no more of you if you were a queen on a throne."

"I don't wish to be a queen, John. I would not be even a great man's wife—unless that great man were——"

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She held out the locket wistfully, smiling and raising her eyes again.

"What did this mean, John, when you brought it up to Paradise?"

"I—I—all my heart was in it, Gypsy!"

"A cold, cold place for your heart to lie, out under Aunt Tabby's rose bush, John. It will be warmer here," and she let the locket fall gently upon her bosom.

It seemed as though she melted into his embrace. The fiddle for once was cast aside. The glory irradiated upon John Longfoot's countenance seemed quite fitting for Paradise, indeed!

"Gypsy! My Gypsy!" he murmured.

"Dear John," she said, and she sighed. "I am afraid you never will be a very fluent lover."

"Give me the old fiddle, Gypsy," he cried. "That shall speak for me."

THE END

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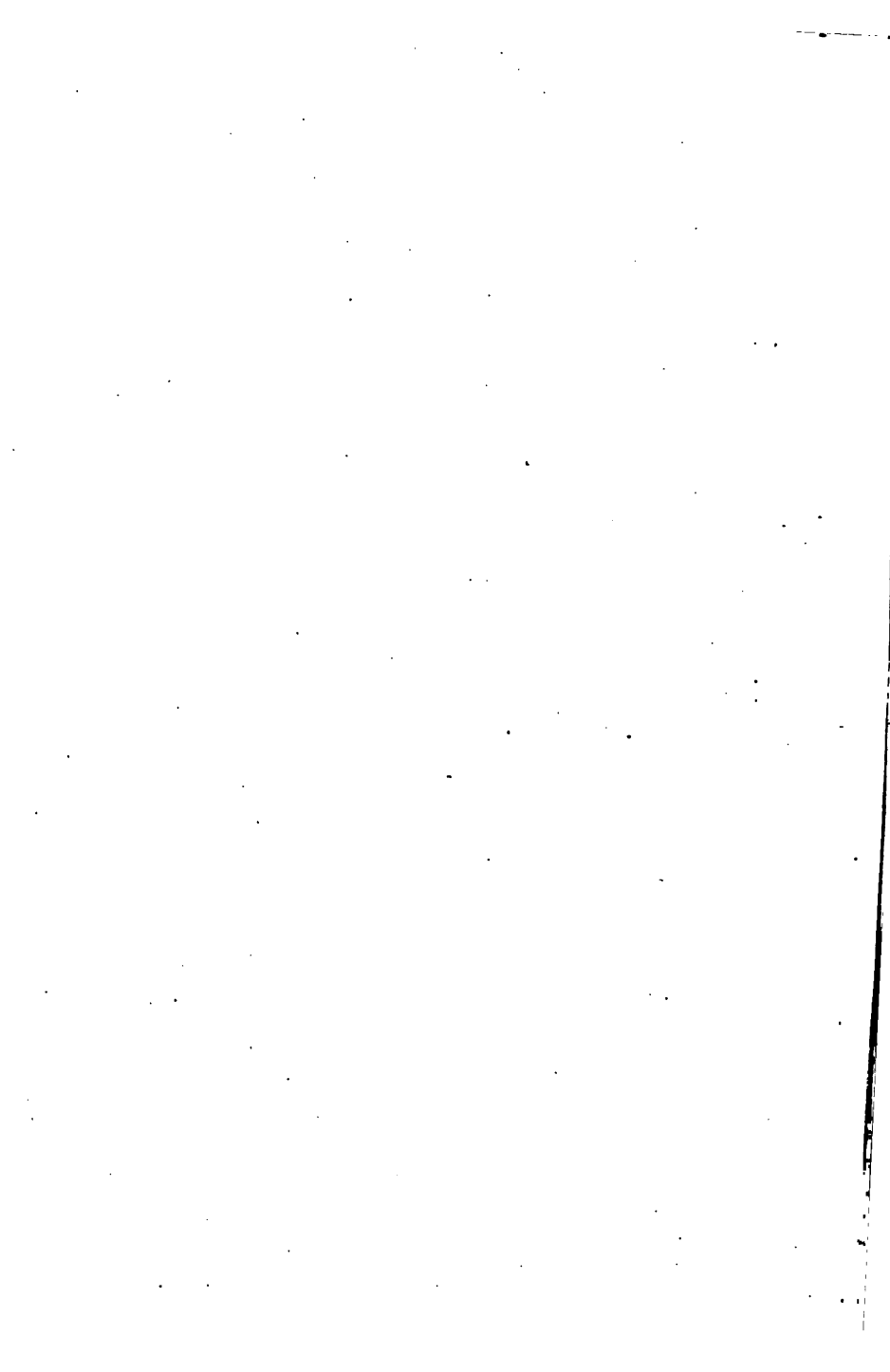
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